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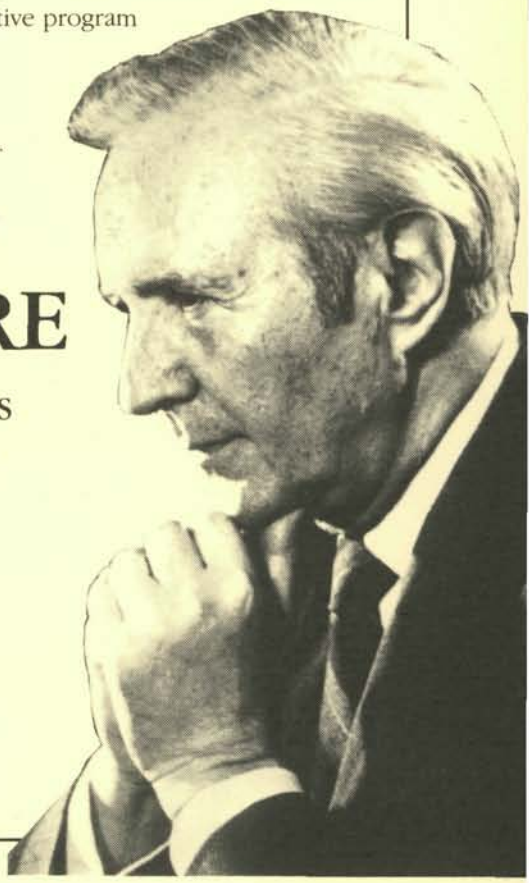

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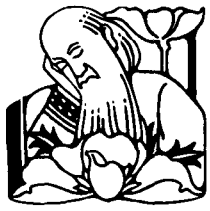

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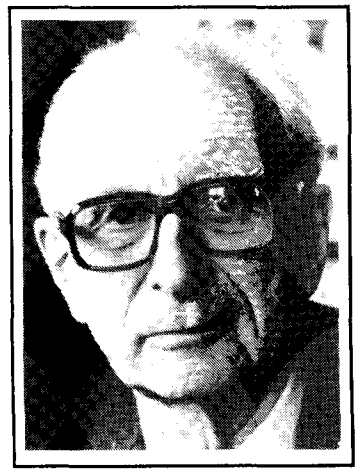

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Life and Letters

A Bonfire of My Vanities

ARISTIDES

A young woman with not a sexy but a very earnest voice telephones, announcing that she is a producer from the local public radio station. She wants to tell me about something that has been troubling her for quite a while. What has been troubling her, it turns out, is political labels. The way people use such words as *liberal* and *radical* and *conservative* and especially *neo-conservative* seem to her so imprecise, slovenly, confusing. She would like to do a radio show about it. What, she wants to know, do I think of the idea? Not very much, I reply, for my sense is that such a subject would make for deadly dull radio. To go into all the permutations of meaning that the word *liberal* has acquired since it surfaced in the nineteenth century seems to me, I tell her, up there with juggling, fire eating, and bake-offs as activities that radio does best to leave alone. She answers that she doesn't think so, adding that her instinct about these matters is pretty good. Besides, she says, I talk so well about the subject. Would I agree to go on an afternoon public radio show, during which I would be interviewed for roughly half an hour and then answer telephone calls from listeners for the other half hour?

I asked if there was any fee, though I was fairly certain that there would be none, and there wasn't. I said my time was very tight just now, for I was under the lash of a number of deadlines. I was told that this was no problem—along with "Have a nice day" and one of the several variations for "Kiss off," "No problem" is one of only three phrases an immigrant nowadays needs to make his way in this country—no problem, since the show would not have to be aired for another three or four weeks. My other objections were met with this same gentle but firm resolve on this young woman's part. Arrangements could be made, things worked out, nothing was impossible. Our conversation ended with my saying that I would think it over. She said she would call me early in the following week.

Once off the phone I began to feel that it might be useful if I—calmly, lucidly—set out a few important distinctions about these political labels and their derivations for an interested audience. A job was to be done here, a service delivered. Given the time it would take to travel down and back to the radio station and to organize my thoughts on the subject, it would no doubt mean the loss of a full day's work. I was not myself a regular listener of public radio, but it occurred to me that perhaps its audience is also my audience. I was, when I came to think about it, much impressed with this young producer's earnestness.

What I should have been impressed with, of course, was my own vanity. What made me think that I was in a position to instruct anyone, not to speak of a fairly large general audience, on a subject about which I had myself only a tenuous grasp? Apart from killing a little time for a radio station, what purpose would be served by trotting out my clichés—"Of course, the terms *Left* and *Right* derive from the division of seating arrangements in the French Assembly after 1848 (or was it 1789?), and the Left, partisan observers have been fond of pointing out, is the side of the heart, the Right that of the liver, heh, heh, heh"—except perhaps freshly to impress myself with my good-natured unwillingness to accept any intellectual limits on my learning this side of dividing fractions?

A day or so later, I came as near as a man with my size ego can come to his senses and decided that public radio could survive nicely without my wobbly pontifications and that only my really quite astonishing vanity had impelled me to consider prattling on in public

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in the first place. I was prepared to tell the earnest young producer when she called back, in the gentlest way, that it was a problem and so to kiss off and have a nice day. But I have to report that she never did call back. Clearly, she had found someone better for the job. If vanity had kidneys, mine could be said to have taken a furious rabbit punch thereat.

Vanity, vanity, vanity—vain, empty, and valueless, Webster calls it, and yet who is without it? Let him who is cast the first comb. Samuel Johnson spoke, iambic pentametrically, of "The Vanity of Human Wishes." Schopenhauer, raising the stakes, wrote "On the Vanity of Existence." Schopenhauer makes a fine distinction between vanity and pride in the book of essays called *Wisdom of Life*, where he writes that "*pride* is an established conviction of one's own paramount worth in some particular respect; while *vanity* is the desire of rousing such a conviction in others and it is generally accompanied by the secret hope of ultimately coming to the same conviction oneself."

Vanity, as with amusingly wicked accuracy Schopenhauer defines it, was the sole motive behind my readiness to go on public radio to discuss political labels. But what about two other invitations that I have recently been offered and have accepted? One is to appear on a panel sponsored by a university to discuss government support for the arts that is to meet in San Diego. The other is to be a moderator for a two-hour session in a conference on the arts sponsored by a foundation. In both cases I was offered a fee, though not a staggering one (given a choice, I prefer to be staggered). But the prospect of a visit to San Diego in the month of February to a man living in the fastness of the Middle West is itself a temptation to which it is easy to surrender. At the foundation's conference there was the prospect of seeing many friends who would also be there. Sunshine, renewed friendships, a bit of cash, none of these things preclude vanity playing a part in accepting these invitations, but because of them at least I can claim mixed motives. Or—another, slightly more complicated point to consider—is my bringing up these various invitations in the first place itself an act of vanity?

I must be watched very carefully in this essay. Suspend any goodwill I may have earned with you. It is one thing for a writer to take up the subject of vanity generally; it is quite another for him to offer to consider his own. Be suspicious. Get the intellectual radar out and humming. Although everyone has vanity, I think it not unfair to state that writers figure to have rather more than other people; and if they are any good at all, they should be expert at disguising it. Don't be fooled. W. H. Auden put the case, if not the argument behind it, in the last stanza of his poem "At the Grave of Henry James," where, asking James to pray for still-living writers, he remarks that "there is no end to the vanity of our calling." No end? Well, none that I have ever seen.

"On the whole," the critic Desmond MacCarthy has written, "I rather suspect that the mainspring of the initial literary impulse is vanity." He goes on to say that he refuses to believe that most people set out to become writers because of an urgent sense of the significance of what they have to write. "They wish to assert themselves and impress others," he writes, "and if they believe otherwise, they deceive themselves." I hope this isn't universally true; I doubt that it's true of, say, Chekhov or Solzhenitsyn. I'm afraid, though, that it is altogether true of me. What I most remember about the emotions connected with my decision—it was more like a wish than a decision—to write was an eagerness bordering on lust to see my name in print. I envisioned my name appended to subtle stories in *The New Yorker*, to elegant poems in *Poetry*, to penetrating cultural criticisms in the old *Partisan Review*. What these stories, poems, and criticisms were about, I envisioned less lucidly. I was not aware of anything in particular that I wanted to write; I had no obsessions that needed to be worked out in print, no messages for mankind (let alone for Garcia), not even anything resembling a pressing urge for expression. My name in print in the right places would have done it. What I wanted was to be among the fraternity of good writers—and I wanted this tremendously.

Not all human wishes are vain; nor is vanity behind all human wishes. My own heat to see my name in print had behind it a genuine if still largely inchoate love of literature. But my desire to be accepted as a good—more than good, an elegant—writer was owing to a quality I have had for as long as I can remember: that of being self-regarding. I have always attempted to maintain a clear view of how I appear to other people—and, for the most

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part, I care considerably how I come off in their estimate. That I might seem coarse or insignificant would trouble me—perhaps inordinately. I say "perhaps" because I am uncertain if others are quite as vain as I. All human beings fall into one of two categories, I have heard it said: the vain and the extremely vain. Some people, disagreeing, say there is only one category into which we all fall: the extremely vain. About this I am less than sure, though I am ready to concede that I myself no doubt fall into it.

Clothes, haircuts, the way I look generally has never been a negligible matter to me. I do not need to be, and never have been, got up in the fashion of the moment. But it would pain me to wear clothes that I thought were ugly, shabby, or even drab. I am a man who feels a little worse for needing a haircut, and a lot worse for having got a bad one. When my shoes are not shined I feel, if not mildly depressed, at least a *schlepper*. But more is entailed in all this than merely wishing to avoid *schlepperosity*. Evidence of this resides in the fact that I have lately taken to buying Charvet bow ties, at nearly $70 a throw. Seventy bones to show a bit of color at my throat is, I realize, ridiculous. Since it is bow and not four-in-hand ties we are talking about, I cannot even see these ties when I wear them. I wear them, apparently, not for myself but for everyone else. The price of $70 frankly appalls me. I am not a rich man—only a vain one.

I assume that these French bow ties quietly announce me as a man of good taste and interesting style, that they help to separate me from the obviously coarse and insignificant. I say "quietly" because these extravagantly priced ties are rather understated. This is as I like it. If there were a machine that could measure vanity, as a polygraph is said to measure lying, I believe I could make such a machine hop and whirl and do as many mechanical gyrations as any man living. But my vanity, which is of a kind not at all uncommon among men, takes the form of pretending not to be vain. I want to appear subdued, not as some dude. I do not wish to stand out—except, decisively, a little.

In the 1960s, during the so-called Peacock Revolution in men's clothes, I went about disguised as a sparrow. Long hair, beards, denim, flowery shirts, great flapping bell-bottoms, boots, I eschewed them all, and without the least touch of regret. Instead of letting it all hang out, as the spirit of the day called for, I carefully tucked it all in. If there is a Hell, and if I am assigned to it, as part of my punishment I suspect that I shall be required to dress for eternity in the standard getup of an assistant professor of English at the University of California (Berkeley) in 1969. My headband will bind, my beard will itch, the denim will chafe my skin, my boots will pinch, and I shall regularly trip over the generous expanse of my bell-bottomed jeans. All this will be hell enough, but what will really hurt will be my vanity. Why shouldn't there be vanity in Hell, too? Vanity Fair, says Thackeray, who wrote the book, "is a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full of all sorts of humbugs and falsenesses and pretensions."

Male vanity, though it may be no more intense than female vanity, is rather more complicated, if only for its having no agreed-upon outlet. Women can choose either to dress for the attack or not. But men who are also on the attack do not always do well to dress for it. (I use the word *attack*, as does the novelist Anthony Powell, in connection with the attempt to conquer the attention of the opposite sex.) Pandemic feminism to the contrary notwithstanding, great vanity in a woman, at least about outward appearance, appalls not and neither does it infuriate in the way that obvious great vanity in a man does. The resources open to women—in costume, in cosmetics, in conniving with one's physique generally—are well known and for the most part not disapproved. Less in this line is available to men, though they are striving to catch up: see here, as the footnotists put it, the men's fragrance section in any large department store.

Still, a too evidently vain man is a pathetic thing, subject to scorn and contempt, and generally receiving both. Something about a man fussing too greatly about his appearance is repellent. One shouldn't too easily be able to imagine a man standing before his mirror, manipulating the strands of his hair under the gale force of a blow-dryer. The working assumption is that a serious man ought to be more concerned about serious matters. Elegance, good looks, an agreeable appearance in a man ought to come easily or not at all. "A man of my limited resources cannot presume to have a hairstyle," Churchill once told his barber, hitting exactly the right masculine note. "Get on with it."

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Fewer and fewer men nowadays are Churchillian in the sense of wishing to get on with it. They prefer instead to linger over it. Male vanities of recent decades have widened; much more leeway is allowed. Yet the chief item upon which masculine vanity is given exercise is the hair of head and face. A future historian of male vanity—what, one wonders, will he look like?—will want to discover the exact date on which the term *hairstyling* entered the language. I cannot make even a rough guess when it did, though I do recall, in the early 1960s, passing a barbershop on Lexington Avenue in New York and sighting men seated inside wearing hair nets. At the time it seemed remarkable to me that men would allow barbers to put hair nets on them and even more remarkable that they didn't mind being seen in this condition by people passing the shop on a heavily trafficked street. Men were not always so shameless. The novelist Arthur Koestler, who had thick dark hair and an impressively low hairline, once upbraided a rival for telling a woman both were pursuing that he, Koestler, slept in a hair net. This was patent nonsense, Koestler maintained; besides, he only used a hair net in his bath.

The shift from getting one's hair cut to getting it styled was decisive, for it turned one's appearance over to a professional for what was in effect exterior decoration. Before, one combed one's hair as seemed most comely; and if comely wasn't a possibility, then as it appeared most seemly. One worked, as Churchill suggested, with the resources at one's disposal. "Don't take too much off the back," one might tell a barber. Or, "I like it full on the sides." Under the regime of hairstyling, your barber tends to tell you how he plans to cut your hair. And these fellows—many among them are women—have extraordinary ideas. It is owing to hairstyling that a vast number of men today walk the streets looking as if they are wearing someone else's hair. The results are frequently (unconsciously) comic, so that one sees a man with the body of Oliver Hardy wearing the hair of General George Custer, or a man with the natural refinement of a power lifter wearing the pompadour of the Comte Robert de Montesquiou.

The Comte, it will be recalled, was the principal model for Proust's Baron de Charlus, and it was to him that Degas declared, "Watch out, M. de Montesquiou, taste is a vice." Montesquiou, France's most perfect dandy, represented male vanity to the highest power. He had himself photographed more than two hundred times and painted by Whistler, Boldoni, Helleu, and others. He wore astonishing getups and amazing ties, and he put more care into his mustache than most men do into their careers. Montesquiou's exorbitant aestheticism—Proust referred to him as Professor of Beauty—set him apart from all other men, even in that outrageously vanity-ridden day.

In our day, every man can be his own Montesquiou, at least from the neck up. Ours has been a time of great creativity in the fashioning of mustaches and beards. While women have cosmetics to alter their looks, men have facial hair. They have been availing themselves of this resource for some time now. I know men of my own age—all of them, it is true, academics—who have been wearing beards for more than a quarter of a century, so that I can scarcely remember what they looked like clean shaven. I can recall, though, a time when a beard seemed a strange peculiarity, worn only by elderly Orthodox Jews, Monty Woolley, George Bernard Shaw, and the baseball team from the House of David. As for mustaches, they seemed a genuine masculine oddity—rare, rather European, and requiring a certain gravity of mien to bring off. They also presented rich comic possibilities, as Charlie Chaplin and Groucho Marx but not Adolf Hitler recognized.

In his autobiography, Carl Zuckmayer, the German poet and playwright who was born in 1896, recollects of his father's generation "how splendidly self-assured, vital, and conscious of success mustaches were in those days." Balanchine, in an interview published in *The New Yorker* not long before he died, said that he thought that the beards of his father's generation were quite authentic but that all contemporary beards were fakes. I think what both Zuckmayer and Balanchine had in mind is that the mustaches and beards of an earlier time were integral to personality; they had to do with more than fashion, served a purpose greater than cosmetic; they in fact expressed inner conviction. Carl Zuckmayer said of his own father's mustache that "it reflected that naive faith in progress, that still unalloyed delight in the results of enterprise, which marked the period between the war of

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1870 and the war of 1914." Today's mustaches and beards, where they are not grown to camouflage a long upper lip or a weak chin, seem more than anything else a form of fantasy. "Who the devil are you supposed to be," said a candid friend of mine to a London editor who had grown long thick sideburns to go along with his goatee, "Brahms or Trotsky?"

Great bushy muttonchops, subtle little imperials, lengthy rabbinicals, food-catching Nietzsches, chaste Amish-Solzhenitsyns, droopy Fu Manchus (or is it Fus Manchu?)—the possibilities in mustache and beard wear is considerable and tempting to the vain. As one of the vain, here I must confess that one summer, vacationing by a lake in the countryside of Wisconsin, I attempted a mustache. I had something rather English in mind: something on the order of a recently mustered-out World War I British cavalry officer now a fellow in classics at Trinity College, Cambridge. This mustache was envisioned as a piece of work at once aristocratic, debonair, intellectual. What in fact in ten or so days grew across my lip was something rather more Latin American in its effect; and I don't mean Cesar Romero Latin American, either. Instead I had the all-too-prominent beginnings of a mustache that looked as if it belonged to one of those anonymous *federales* in the movie *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. No, as I once heard a young professor of English declare upon returning from an MLA meeting, "it wasn't what I had in mind." That mustache never left Wisconsin.

But even if it had appeared to work, if the mustache had been a perfect little objet d'art, it wouldn't really have worked. I am not a man who can grow a mustache one day, a beard a month later, and pop on an earring on Saturday night. I am what I am. From the age of roughly twenty my personal style, such as it is, has remained much the same. With only small variations, I wear the same kind of clothes now as then; I have my hair cut short and I brush it in the same undramatic style as I have since college. (A friend recently likened my hair, in its immutability, to Astroturf, which I took as a compliment.) A little dull I may be, but, as Napoleon must have thought when he was made emperor, I can live with that. Meanwhile my distinction resides in my being, as I like to think myself, the least likely man in America to show up in a ponytail.

But my vanity about my appearance is small-time stuff next to my vanity as an author. The vanity of authors is by now famous, or at least it ought to be. "But enough talk about me," the caption of a cartoon in *Publishers Weekly* ran, "what do you think about my new book?" Perhaps the reason behind authorial vanity has to do with writers working a good bit alone, often with doubt, not to say extreme dubiety, about the outcome. Perspective gets lost. The two quite contradictory notions that every writer must keep in balance in his mind at all times—that what he is writing at the moment is of thunderous importance and that it is most unlikely to have a long life—frequently get muddled. Add to this that in some circles—generally quite small ones—writers are greatly revered and hotly over-praised. All of which combines to make for a problem in self-esteem for many of us who write; the problem is that we have too much of it.

At least I know I do, and not very deep down, either, but right up there near the surface. The other day, for example, I received in the mail a most friendly notice of a forthcoming book of mine; the notice begins by saying that I am "one of a handful of living Americans who have mastered the familiar essay." Nice, no? You would think that might please me. If you do, you show how little you know about the vanity of writers. I stopped upon reading that opening clause; I was "brought up by it," as used to be said. A handful who have mastered the familiar essay, I thought. I didn't know there were others. Who, I wondered, might they be? I hope nobody thinks I am making this up.

As with appearance, so with authorship: my vanity is the vanity of, above all, wishing not to seem vain. (If nothing so improves the appearance as a high opinion of oneself, it occurs to me that I ought to be better looking than I am.) When it comes to my writing, I prefer not to blow my own piccolo or, at any rate, not to be caught blowing it. "But it is more agreeable to preserve the modesty," says Agatha Christie's M. Hercule Poirot after explaining to still another ignorant Englishman that he is the world's greatest detective. Something about playing the great author—on television and radio chat shows, at bookshop signing parties—goes against my peculiar kind of vanity. So I do not promote my books, even though I could find uses for the additional money that promotion might bring in—

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visions of a closet filled with French bow ties dance in my head—and I am eager to have as many intelligent readers as possible.

My anti-vanity vanity, which begins to sound like reverse snobbery, runs to the details of book publication. I don't, for example, like to have my photograph appear on the dust jacket of my books. Better, in my view, to let readers imagine what the author they are reading looks like, better a vague apparition than the locked-in, visible definiteness of photography. In my own case, I find I don't particularly enjoy being photographed by professional photographers. Like barbers, tailors, and plastic surgeons, they live day in and day out with other people's vanity, and in their presence I find I grow anxious lest I expose mine. "That's good. Hold it. In this shot you look just like Camus," a photographer once told me. "And you look just like Henri Cartier-Bresson," I replied, just to show him that two could play at this liar's game.

Then there is the matter of blurbs, which calls for asking other writers to indite a few promotional sentences on behalf of one's new book. I do not myself give blurbs and have never wanted them. When asked to write a blurb for someone's book by his publisher, I respond by saying that I only write blurbs for authors who have died and that my blurbs truly aren't worth dying for. I am embarrassed—which may be only another way of saying "too vain"—to ask other writers to supply blurbs for my books and have always chosen not to do so. But now, this year, I am going to have a collection of short stories published, and my editor, whose views I much respect, informs me that it would be immensely helpful to my little volume to have a few blurbs written in support of it. I have agreed to go along. I shall be grateful enough if convincing blurbs can be found, but the vainglorious truth is that there are only four living writers of fiction from whom I should genuinely be pleased to have blurbs—I. B. Singer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, V. S. Naipaul, and Andrei Sinyavsky—and none of them, like me, so far as I know, dispenses blurbs.

But, then, truth to tell, I should prefer most of all to have blurbs from writers who are no longer blurbistically feasible, so to speak, because they are long dead. As for the blurbs I have in mind, they would read something like the following:

"He is a writer I take very seriously indeed."
—T. S. Eliot

"Il est un écrivain exquis."
—Marcel Proust

"This guy cracks me up."
—Franz Kafka

"Penetration and subtlety have never, in my experience, been so elegantly suffused with irresistible charm."
—Max Beerbohm

Now these are blurbs I can go with.

Koved is what the Jews call honor and glory, and I have not won enough of either to be vain about my own *koved*. I have been given an honorary doctorate from a university whose president would, I believe, be ready to allow that it is not yet first-class, and one of my books has won a regional prize. The only other award I have won is for tossing in 21 of 25 free throws at Green Briar Park in Chicago at the age of thirteen, for which I was supposed to receive a trophy but never did. All three of these awards have been immensely pleasing to me. Greater ones might have meant less. Such is my vanity that I don't think I care much to win honors that have been given to people before me who I don't think are fundamentally very honorable. By now, of course, nearly every prize in this nation has gone to someone or other whom your normally vain man is likely to find not only beneath him but also a touch beneath contempt. It is a problem, but not a deep one. "A man who pursues *koved*," I am told it says in the Talmud, "from him *koved* runs away." Let it run has become my view. I am for winning all possible prizes and awards, but at the same time I have reached an age where no prize or award will quell my doubts or satisfy my vanity.

"It is not possible," says La Rochefoucauld, "to enumerate all the kinds of vanity." Yet I feel I would be remiss if I didn't mention my vanity about what I take to be my general savvy about the world. There is no compelling evidence for my holding this belief, but hold it I do, quite in defiance of much experience to the contrary. Wary of being made a fool of—in modern life, my view is, paranoia is the better part of valor—I have not infrequently

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attempted to ward this condition off by attempting, ever so delicately, to fool others. Never shall I forget taking in a car to be repaired and telling the mechanic, lest he take me for a man entirely ignorant about cars (which of course I am), that I wasn't quite sure what was wrong, for I had only recently put in a throw-out bearing, faintly suggesting that I had done the job myself. In fact, I once had a throw-out bearing replaced in a car I owned, but what I didn't realize, and only later learned, was that a throw-out bearing is only required in a car with a clutch, and the car I was now bringing in for repair, having an automatic transmission, had no clutch. How the mechanic, over whose eyes I was attempting to pull the polyester, must have laughed and said confidently to himself, "Gotcha, buster!" "The surest way to be taken in is to think oneself craftier than other people," says (again) La Rochefoucauld. Thank you, my dear Duc, but if I want your advice, I shall ask for it.

One form of vanity I thought I was free of is family vanity. I hope my parents will forgive my saying so, but I come of a most nondistinguished family—if distinction be determined by achievement in public life, the arts, science, or commerce. In all these lines, we have, I can say without hesitation, done diddly. Not only did we fail to come over on the *Mayflower*, but we were lucky to have missed the *Lusitania*. I have often been at some confusion about describing my precise social class, until a short while ago when, reading an account of the life of Mrs. Humphrey Ward, I noted Mrs. Ward described as being of "the cultivated middle class." On the spot I concluded that I come from the "uncultivated middle class," or that class which lives in a certain comfort made possible by money but hasn't the least interest in culture. I have never had any shame about that, though no special pride in it either. Life without ancestors, at least in twentieth-century America, is scarcely a hardship. But then I recalled a remark of Freud's, one doubtless intended to describe his own social condition, which was that better than having ancestors is to be an ancestor. Just so, *mais oui*, and Eureka: I concluded that I, with a lot of luck, may just one day turn out to be an ancestor. Vanity, once more, finds a way.

When I was much younger, a famous novelist told me I was very worldly, and I have ever since been secretly vain about this. I have long thought myself a man of fastidious taste—"fastidiousness is the most pardonable of vices," said Chesterton, "but it is the most unpardonable of virtues"—and yet with a wide tolerance for taste less chaste than my own. A world where everyone dressed or felt about matters of taste as I did would be very dull. But so would a world where I couldn't make fun of those who don't, or they of me. Vanity is nothing if not invidious; nor is it known to obey the law of contradictions. My own vanity allows me to be tolerant yet hypercritical, reasonable yet perverse, worldly yet contemptuous of mere worldlings. Most convenient. I shouldn't know how to live without it.

"Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." That of course comes from Ecclesiastes, the book in the Old Testament that addresses itself to the question of vanity with rather depressing results, concluding over and over again: "Behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." The author of Ecclesiastes is not alone in his bleak views. As I have mentioned, Samuel Johnson wrote in rhyming couplets of "The Vanity of Human Wishes," and Schopenhauer, who could take all the smiles out of Christmas, upped the ante in writing about "The Vanity of Existence," by which he meant all of it. Yet I wonder if it isn't closer to the truth to say not that human existence is vain but that vanity is part of human existence. I prefer Montaigne on this subject. In his essay "Of Vanity," he writes: "If others examine themselves attentively, as I do, they would find themselves, as I do, full of inanity and nonsense. Get rid of it I cannot without getting rid of myself. We are all steeped in it, one as much as another; but those who are aware of it are a little better off—though I don't know." I particularly like that final clause: "though I don't know." I don't, either, though I remain hopeful that awareness might make one perhaps a touch better off.

Montaigne's lengthy essay on vanity is highly digressive, even for him, who averred that his "ideas follow one another, but sometimes it is from a distance, and look at each other, but with a sidelong glance." In fact, Montaigne's essay seems to be chiefly about death. Perhaps it is right that it should be so, for vanity, for all its inanity, at its best speaks to an avidity for the world; and it is in the light of death, as the author of Ecclesiastes well

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knew, that all seems vain. Yet anyone who is confident that vanity is purged by a recognition of death, even a very close recognition, may find himself surprised. I recall Sir William Haley once telling me that, when he was editor of the *Times* of London, he one evening received a call from the butler of Lord X informing him that his lordship did not expect to make it through the night. What Lord X was doing in having his butler call was to give the *Times* a chance to get his obituary in good order, which strikes me as less astonishing than all too human.

Arthur Schopenhauer, Samuel Johnson, Edward Gibbon, I have a distinct taste for these vanity-oh-all-is-vanity boys. They seem to have put so much energy into demonstrating that life is all a scam, a shuck, a silly if rather large-scale cosmic joke. Yet, if what they say was true, why did they themselves embark on such careful, monumental, furiously impressive works? I think it is because they didn't finally believe it. What they all knew and believed is that men and women are wondrous in their ability to take their eyes off the ball, to become wildly distracted, to believe astonishing nonsense, to let things get so badly out of hand that there can be little arguing with Henry James, when, in an essay on Turgenev, he wrote: "Evil is insolent and strong, beauty enchanting but rare; goodness very apt to be weak; folly very apt to be defiant; wickedness to carry the day; imbeciles to be in very great places, people of sense in small, and mankind generally unhappy."

Schopenhauer, who was himself a meticulous dresser and who seemed to get so much pleasure out of showing why men are so miserable, may be quite right when he writes that vanity is "the appropriate term for that which has no solid or intrinsic value," but how much bleaker life would be without it. From Schopenhauer's perspective, we would all go under but for the agency of two simple impulses, hunger and the sexual instinct, "aided a little, perhaps, by the influence of boredom." Ought not vanity to be tossed in there, not only as a form of assuaging boredom (your vain man or woman is rarely bored, having him- or herself perpetually to contemplate) but in helping the world to go round, and for many of us to keep it spinning in the most amusing way.

Suggesting this redeeming social value for vanity is not intended as a provocation, a piece of intellectual perversity, like arguing that Mozart died too late or that we owe the invention of blood plasma to Hitler. I quite mean it. Much of the little I have been able to accomplish thus far in life I find is owed in good part to vanity—with most of the remainder owed to guilt. Look to your own life to discover if it is much different. My bet is that it isn't. As for stakes, what about two of my French bow ties against your blow-dryer?

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Why Were We Surprised?

W. R. CONNOR

WHY WERE WE SO SURPRISED? After seventy years, communism, a system that had long since been morally discredited, whose economic theories and practices had proved themselves unproductive, whose exploitation of subject peoples gave the lie to its rhetoric, collapsed, swiftly, decisively. No one, it seems, foresaw the collapse with any clarity; no one predicted it, despite the vast efforts and expenditures that had been devoted to Sovietology, the large number of individual scholars and think tanks, the centers at most major universities, governmental intelligence agencies, etc., the entire thirty billion dollar a year expenditure aimed at anticipating radical change. Yet for all papers, articles, books, and the contingency plans that had been developed, policies were clearly not in place to deal with changes of the scale and pace that we have encountered. The events in central and eastern Europe were not the first to find us unprepared. When the Tiananmen Square massacre took place, one of the country's leading China specialists wrote:

> I am a chastened China watcher, as are many of my colleagues in universities and think tanks. Not since the Iranian revolution have the analysts been so surprised by global developments of such strategic and social significance. . . . Specialists knew twists and turns would occur. . . . But no China specialist—in or out of the government—foresaw the massive setback that occurred. (M. Oksenberg, *Newsweek*, June 19, 1989)

In the case of Iran, one could argue with some legitimacy that we simply lacked sufficient numbers of trained specialists—our neglect of the great arc that stretches from Turkey through Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and thence to Southeast Asia is notorious. The argument is less plausible for China and fails completely for the Soviet Union and the former East Bloc. Our failure to support the study of certain areas of the world may hurt us in the future, but the causes of our recent surprise lie elsewhere.

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It is more compelling to argue as Martin Malia did in his article "To the Stalin Mausoleum," published under the pseudonym "Z" in the Winter 1989 issue of *Daedalus*, that

> during the past twenty odd years mainline Western Sovietology has . . . prepared us . . . poorly for the present crisis. It has by and large foisted on Soviet reality social science categories derived from Western realities, with the result that the extraordinary, indeed surreal Soviet experience has been rendered banal to the point of triviality.

Malia meant by this that the shift from a "totalitarian model," emphasizing politics and ideology to one based on society and economics, posited a "social base" in the proletariat and peasantry from which the superstructure of the regime logically derived. "Social science categories" in other words validated the claims that the Soviet regime made for itself—that its centralization and dictatorial policies were necessary for the benefit of the proletariat.

Perhaps Malia's criticism does not go far enough. Mainline Western Sovietology has also relied on a very narrow range of factors in its analyses: military force, economics, agricultural productivity, and the relationships among a leadership elite. As Sovietology veered towards Kremlinology, it became less able to deal with the changes and attitudes that were taking place in other parts of Soviet society and in countries that the Soviet Union had long dominated. The economic crisis in the Soviet Union could be documented and "modeled," despite disagreements about precise figures. This could in turn lead to analyses of the policy options available to the Soviet leadership and their likely effect on relations between the USSR and other states. Such modeling left out the passions—the appeal of ethnic loyalty and nationalism, the demands for freedom of religious practice and cultural expression, and the feeling that the regime had simply lost its moral legitimacy. These considerations were "soft" or "unscientific," and those who emphasized them could be scorned.

The understanding of the East Bloc was even more deficient. Orthodox analyses left little room for someone like Vaclav Havel and the movements that he represents, or for the significance of the fact that there was a diplomatically active Polish pope, or, once the changes began, for the intensity of ethnic feelings and the demands for national independence. These analyses bear a curious resemblance to attitudes that once prevailed in modernization studies, when it was widely assumed that over time pre-modern societies would evolve, given the proper advice and aid, in the direction of Western European and American societies. They would become like us, secular states with an

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economy based on significant industrialization and a social system based on Western ideas of toleration and civil liberty, or so it was predicted. Tribalism, ethnicity, old-fashioned agricultural and nutritional practices, deeply rooted local traditions would be replaced by patterns familiar to us. No one, to the best of my knowledge, approaches the issues of development in this way any longer, for it is now admitted that the reality of many countries simply failed to fit these theories. They left out too much, not least the persistent claims that primary attachments have upon people—the ties to family, kin, neighborhood, brotherhood, and tribe, and their manifestations in religion, ritual practice, or tribal custom. They failed to note the link between traditional practices and local environments, or to ask in what sort of society people wanted to live.

These exclusions are remarkably similar to the ones that have prevailed in the analysis of the Soviet Union and its former dependencies: attention was focused on a presumed center consisting of the quantifiables, the economy, the armed forces, and their likely application. The periphery—geographical, social, cultural, ethnic—was neglected. The imported Western presumptions of economic rationality had left little room for the traditions and values that shape behavior in different cultures.

A common reliance on an economics that neglected context could be found both in modernization theory and in Sovietology. The obvious economic distress of the Soviet Union and its former dependencies encouraged the simplistic attitude that all could be explained by narrowly defined economic factors. But such factors do not work in a vacuum, nor do political changes of the extent that we have witnessed result from passing some fixed point on a scale of economic well-being below which a regime automatically loses its requisite support. Such a view leaves out of consideration the psychological and emotional factors that lead people sometimes to tolerate extreme deprivation and at other times to be dissatisfied even with significantly improving standards of living.

The emotional context of economic and political change is precisely what has proved most difficult for many analysts to assess. Such considerations have only a marginal place in the dominant paradigm for understanding political change. The result is avoidance of and perplexity about some of the most important factors in the recent developments. This is especially evident in attempts to account for the fact that so many of the leaders of the movements demanding democratic change in statist regimes have been artists, intellectuals, teachers, and students, and that the issues that defined the changes we have witnessed have often found their expression in art and literature. This is surely in part because under

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totalitarian regimes art and literature provide a means for discussing and thinking about freedom and the nature of social change when other avenues are blocked or corrupted. But it is also in part because cultural issues are central in many societies, including our own. The division that relegates art, literature, philosophy, religion, and so forth, to an essentially private sphere and equates the public realm with economics, foreign relations, military matters, and other "important" issues has flagrantly failed. If we understand that the term *cultural* concerns official languages, schooling, freedom of artistic and religious expression, ethnic or national identity, then cultural issues are clearly as central to political life as the economic ones with which they are often inextricably intertwined.

At a more general level, scholarship in the humanities and related social sciences has shown in recent years that the way people express themselves, argue about values and history, use symbols to express identity, or find their place in the universe has immense public ramifications. Any good historian or anthropologist can provide abundant examples from other societies, but the political debate about government financing of art and countless other issues in the United States underlines the political significance of cultural matters. The surprise then is not that culture is an area of intense contestation in many societies, but rather that we are reluctant to recognize that fact and that models of analysis persist that radically undervalue cultural concerns.

The loss of moral legitimacy of statist regimes has proved even more difficult for Western analysts to discuss and to assess properly. This cannot entirely be explained by a reluctance to accept all parts of the moral critique of the Soviet system that has received the greatest attention—that by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. The avoidance goes beyond a distrust of the elements of mysticism, Russian nationalism, and suspected anti-Semitism in Solzhenitsyn's work, and comes closer to a "taboo," as Leon Aron has suggested. Yet surely the idea that the moral illegitimacy of a regime may lead to its collapse does not entail naive moral judgments or rabid chauvinism. When one Soviet commentator refers to the mass strikes in Soviet Armenia in February 1988 as "a moral Chernobyl," he points beyond an economic and political phenomenon to a fundamental issue in the decline in Soviet power—a loss of moral authority.

Finally, there was belief in inevitability, the widespread assumption that, for our lifetime at least, the Soviet Empire was here to stay. Gregory Fossedal in his book *The Democratic Imperative* has documented the movement away from George Kennan's belief set forth in his article in *Foreign Affairs* for July 1947:

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> The United States has in its power to . . . promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power. (Fossedal, p. 21)

As we read Fossedal's account we can see that Vaclav Havel's comments in his speech on New Year's Day apply not only to his fellow Czechoslovakians, but to many in the West as well:

> All of us have grown used to the totalitarian system and accepted as an immutable fact, and thereby actually helped keep it going.

And so of course, as Havel said,

> Everywhere in the world, people were surprised how these malleable humiliated, cynical citizens of Czechoslovakia, who seemingly believed in nothing, found the tremendous strength to cast off the totalitarian system in an entirely peaceful and dignified manner. Humanistic and democratic tradition slept on, after all, somewhere in the unconscious mind of our nation.

The idea that totalitarian regimes were inevitable seemed to apply especially to what was called—ominously—*Eastern* Europe, a place whose name invited the old cliché of "oriental despotism."

The corollary to this belief in inevitability was the idea that free governments were inherently weak and vulnerable, an attitude shared across much of the political spectrum. In 1984 it was not implausible to suggest as Jean-François Revel did that "democracy may, after all, turn out to have been a parenthesis that is closing before our eyes" (Fossedal, p. 17). How easy it was then to be surprised, when new support for multi-party systems emerged not only in Europe but in some African and Latin American countries and when the events of the recent annus mirabilis took place.

II

Kremlinology and the analyses that have been offered of so many other areas crucial to our national well-being have clearly been based on false premises. But I confess a certain sympathy even for the narrowest and most arrogant of the analysts. For what we have seen is not simply another example of incremental change, a shift that one should be able to anticipate if alert and well enough informed. We have experienced instead a crisis, not in the technical Marxist sense or in the usage of everyday speech, but in a sense closer to that of Jacob Burkhardt:

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> Something breaks out, subverting the public order. Either it is suppressed, whereupon the ruling power, if it is a wise one, will find some remedy, or, unexpectedly to most people, a crisis in the whole state of things is produced, involving whole epochs and all or many peoples of the same civilization, since invasions, undertaken and suffered, ensue of themselves. The historical process is suddenly accelerated in terrifying fashion. Developments which otherwise take centuries seem to flit by like phantoms in months or weeks, and are fulfilled.

Burkhardt was speaking primarily of a crisis within a single state, although he was well aware of the tendency of such crises to spread beyond national boundaries, especially in an era of rapid communications. His observations invite, however, a reformulation in the present situation, one closer to the title *World Historical Observations (Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen)* that has come to be used for Burkhardt's lectures and observations as gathered together by his nephew Jacob Oeri. For in the closely interconnected modern world, changes of the scale that we have recently seen are not restricted to one region. The bankruptcy of Soviet models of Marxism, if not of Marxism itself, the corruptions inherent in single-party states, the inability of communist economies to secure high levels of production—all have reverberations in other parts of the world, including Latin America and Africa, as will the effects of secessionist movements in the Soviet Union, the realignment of power through the unification of Germany, and so forth. Surely the crisis we face is a world historical one in a sense of which even Burkhardt could not have dreamed.

In such periods of radical change it is consoling to turn to historical analogies. The past year has been no exception—the Czechs provided one when they shouted " '89 is '68 turned upside down." The anniversary of the French Revolution led others to cite Wordsworth's lines:

> Bliss was it to be alive
> But to be young was very Heaven!

Yet this analogy is a frightening one. Even more so are the much discussed parallels to 1848—when exuberant hopes were swiftly dashed.

Such analogies provide consolation and reassurance—the sense that the path we are on has been traveled once before and however hazardous has not destroyed us. At the same time they promise predictions about the future, the hope that we will not be surprised by the next stage of developments. In this respect their promises are almost surely illusory, for the complexity of a true historical crisis on the global scale makes it unlikely that a past set of circumstances will be replicated with sufficient precision to yield any useful prediction.

The utility of historical analogies lies not in their predictive but in their heuristic power. A historical analogy, properly drawn, does not

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foretell the course of events but alerts the observer to possibilities that might be overlooked in other forms of examination. The analogies to 1789 and 1848 serve primarily to underline the potential for radical reaction following on exuberant change. At a deeper level, however, they may suggest something more easily overlooked—the scale and persistence of true crises. The consequences of both the French Revolution and the movements of 1848 persisted for so long that they alert us to the likelihood of persistent and probably quite unpredictable changes emanating from recent events.

That assessment is reinforced if one turns to an analogy that is no less striking than those from modern European history but has been less thoroughly considered. The collapse of Spartan power in the fourth century B.C. provides one of the most striking examples from classical antiquity of a sudden and unpredicted change, the clearest instance of the collapse of a communist ideology, and the most awe-inspiring spectacle of the scale and persistence of the aftereffects of such change.

On a single day in July 371 B.C., the entire political geography of Greece permanently changed. The crack troops of Sparta, whose fathers and grandfathers had fought and ultimately defeated Athens in the long Peloponnesian War, now engaged a former ally, Thebes, on a small plain near Leuctra. The Spartans had good reason for confidence—their military training and effectiveness were widely regarded as the best in the Greek world, their proclaimed goal of liberating the cities of the area from Theban domination assured Sparta of sympathy and support in many quarters; their troops outnumbered the enemy, perhaps by nearly two to one. But when the day was over, the Theban force, using unconventional wedge tactics, had broken the Spartan line, killed the Spartan commander and many of the city's best troops.

The victory was less surprising than the sequel. Many of the cities in areas formerly dominated by Sparta now threw out pro-Spartan governments, and the *harmosts*, Spartan officials who supervised the local governments, were expelled. Throughout the Peloponnese a surge of enthusiasm for democracy coincided with revulsion at Spartan domination.

Thebes moved swiftly to turn this momentum into a permanent realignment of power, seeing to it that Messenia, the region to the west that Sparta had for centuries politically subjugated and economically exploited, regained its independence and built its military strength. In Arcadia, immediately to the north of Sparta, similar anti-Spartan movements were encouraged in an area that Sparta had previously controlled through client regimes. Now many Arcadian towns fused into a single larger city whose new military strength was another counterbalance to Sparta.

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These changes resulted from a single, dramatic military defeat, but behind the loss on the battlefield can be seen a long period of economic stagnation and the gradual attrition of a once-dominant ideology. The sequel can only be properly understood when it is recognized that the battle was not simply another in the interminable series of battles among the city-states of ancient Greece, but posed in intense form the question of the adequacy of the polis as a form of social organization. The assumption that one city or another among the Greeks would secure a position of benign hegemony and establish thereby some unity and security in the Greek world was challenged by the collapse first of Athens and then of Sparta within a single generation. The implication of the battle, then, was less the ability of one formerly dominant state to continue its pre-eminence than the possibility that the form of social organization used throughout the Greek world might itself need radical modification.

This surely was not evident to many Greeks at the time. Yet in retrospect the Spartan defeat at Leuctra points forward to the crisis of the Greek city-states that culminated in the rise of the Macedon in the north, the conquests of Alexander in the east, and the eventual domination of much of the ancient world by Macedonian monarchies. The Greek city-states, to be sure, did not disappear, but they persisted by establishing relationships to new political forms, such as the Macedonian monarchy or new leagues and federal states.

It was not until the second quarter of the third century B.C. that some crude semblance of international order re-established itself in the eastern Mediterranean—nearly a century after the battle of Leuctra. In the meantime almost everything had changed, the principal players in the geopolitical drama, the nature of civic life, the attitudes and values of those who had survived a period of unparalleled turbulence, the assumptions about what was central and what was peripheral in international relations.

The heuristic value of this analogy lies only partially in the scale and persistence of true crises. More significant is the possibility that in both classical Greece and in the events of the recent annus mirabilis basic forms of social organization are themselves at issue, in the Greek case the city-states and hegemonial relationships among them; in the current situation, the multi-ethnic nation-state.

Surely it is not entirely a coincidence that the remarkable political changes in Europe during the past year have coincided with widespread resurgence of demands for ethnic autonomy and consequent challenges to multi-ethnic states. These tensions have been evident in some African and Asian lands, and throughout the Middle East and the Balkans and in Canada. The fact that ethnic and racial tensions in the United States

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usually take on, so far at least, a different coloration should not blind us to the international significance of the challenge to multi-ethnic national states and its implications for the future. It is one more indication that there is reason to expect that we are entering into a period of indeterminate change, and that another of Burkhardt's observations again applies:

> The crisis which has one specific cause is borne along on the storm-wind of many other things, yet not a man involved in it but is absolutely blind as to the force which will finally win the day. Individuals and masses attribute everything that irks them, without exception, to the existing dispensation, while for the most part what they are suffering under is inherent in human frailty. A glance at the inadequacy of everything on earth, at the thrift of nature in her household outside of human life, should suffice to prove it. But men generally imagine that history behaves differently from nature.

III

There is reason then to suspect that the current world situation constitutes an indeterminate system, one with close interconnections among the constituent parts, and recurrent patterns such as the tendency toward disintegration in the multi-ethnic state, but one not amenable to accurate predictions. If this is correct, it is not surprising that no one, policy analyst, intelligence expert, area specialist, or historian predicted the changes of the past year or so. Such systems are as resistant to conventional social scientific techniques as to attempts to apply historical analogies or laws.

How then shall we formulate policy, educate the statesman, and hope to survive in a world of radical indeterminacy? The answer is unlikely to be found in more elaborate calculations, more sophisticated modeling, or greater expenditures on the familiar forms of "security studies." Nor will it be sufficient to add a little history, literature, or anthropology to existing programs in policy studies. A greater attunement to emotional and moral factors, to the persistent claims of primary attachments, and of religious, ethnic, and national identities must be at the core of the education of the statesman and the citizen, not an afterthought or a concession to the importance of factors that have hitherto been underweighted. We badly need a fresh approach to the understanding of the world situation, one that is grounded in a serious study of culture and the nature of long-term historical change. Yet such an approach cannot be expected to produce useful predictions, or short-range solutions to pressing international problems.

For that no apology is required. In a situation such as we confront all claims of prediction are likely to be illusory and pernicious. They invite

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over-confidence, focus attention on one region or problem, allocate resources to respond to one likely danger, while in periods of radical change powers emerge in regions that had formerly seemed insignificant and challenges present themselves in unanticipated forms. Our repeated offers to develop systems of prediction, the lavish expenditures on security studies, the efforts to force history into the form of laws or predictive analogies are all forms of dependency. They shield us from the true nature of our situation—a world of radical and essentially unpredictable change.

Worst of all, they discourage the development of the attitudes upon which true security is likely to be based: an awareness of complexity, a respect for limits, and what the Greeks would call "practical intelligence." Practical intelligence is a wiliness that maneuvers through careful observation and thorough acquaintance with one's potential adversaries and by imagining the unimaginable. At its heart is the recognition that in diplomacy, as in war, plans rarely work out as expected and ironic outcomes are to be anticipated. It prizes, above all, adaptability and teaches, first of all, preparedness. It offers no solutions, no predictions, no assurances of swift reform or universal concord. But in a world of unexpected outcomes such modesty may provide our best hope of survival.

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Behind the Rushdie Affair

BERNARD LEWIS

On February 14, 1989, the Ayatollah Khomeini, the highest Islamic religious authority in Iran, issued a *fatwa* "to inform all the zealous Muslims of the world that the blood of the author of the book entitled *The Satanic Verses*, which has been compiled, printed, and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, and the Qur'an, as also of those involved in its publication who were aware of its contents, is hereby declared forfeit. I call on all zealous Muslims to dispatch them quickly, wherever they may be found, so that no one will dare to insult Islamic sanctities again. Anyone who is himself killed in this path will be deemed a martyr." Shortly after, the head of an Islamic charitable trust in Tehran offered a bounty to anyone who carried out this sentence—twenty million tumans (about three million dollars at the official rate, about $170,000 at the open-market rate) for an Iranian, one million dollars for a foreigner. So far the bounty has not been claimed.

Strictly speaking, a *fatwa* is a responsum, a legal opinion or ruling given in answer to a question, and is not in itself a judicial verdict or sentence. Khomeini's *fatwa* has, however, been treated, by its defenders and opponents alike, as combining both characters, and an enormous literature has appeared, in many languages, discussing the merits of the case. This discussion has been concerned almost exclusively, on the Western side, with the literary and political issues raised by the condemnation; on the Iranian side, with considerable but not universal Islamic support, with the alleged insult to Islam. Remarkably little attention has been given to the Islamic legal and historical issues raised by Khomeini's *fatwa* and the Muslim responses to it: What offense against Muslim law is Rushdie alleged to have committed? What jurisdiction can be claimed for Muslim law and judges over persons in non-Muslim countries? And how valid are the historical precedents, from the life of the Prophet, cited by Iranian spokesmen in support of Khomeini's action? It is with these issues only that I shall be concerned.

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I do not therefore intend to discuss the literary merit or lack of merit of the book. Good books enjoy no immunities from the law, bad books are subject to no penalties from the law, merely because they are good or bad. To condemn the one or privilege the other on the basis of literary merit would give to literary critics the right to determine not only the publication or suppression of a book but the life or death of its author, and that might seem excessive even by present-day norms of literary criticism. The literary quality of the book is irrelevant to what I have to say, and I shall at no point touch on it.

A second theme that I do not intend to discuss is freedom of speech. I do not by any means wish to suggest that this is unimportant or that it is irrelevant to the Rushdie affair, but it is not the aspect with which I am concerned. Let me just say that I am a firm believer in freedom of speech. I do not believe that this freedom should be completely without limits. I do believe that such limits should be defined and enforced by due process of law.

A third question that I prefer not to discuss is whether or not *The Satanic Verses* is insulting to Islam. For one thing, I am not quite sure what the phrase "insulting to Islam" really means. For another, insofar as it means anything, it is for Muslims and only for Muslims to decide whether the book is insulting to Islam or not. And since there are approximately a billion Muslims in the world, there are some further questions that must be answered, such as how that decision is made on their behalf and by whom, how that decision is to be made known and how put into effect. These, too, are matters for Muslims alone to decide, except insofar as their decisions may run counter to the laws of the United States, the United Kingdom, or other non-Muslim countries in which they may live.

One other literary point that I would like to mention only in passing is the argument sometimes made that *The Satanic Verses* is a novel and that Muslims don't understand novels because they have none in their literatures. There are by now a great number of novels in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, and other Muslim languages, but the novel as such is indeed a Western importation to the Islamic world. Dating back little more than a century, it may not yet have reached the Mullahs and their flocks. There is, however, an old and indigenous literary tradition of satire and parody. Both are well represented in classical literature, sometimes on very sacred themes.

Before turning to the Islamic legal and historical implications of the Rushdie affair, it may be useful to look very briefly at the chronology of events. In September 1988, *The Satanic Verses* was first published in the United Kingdom. In the following months there were rumblings of dissatisfaction and protest among Muslims in the United Kingdom and in

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their countries of origin, in India and Pakistan. In November 1988, the book was reviewed in the literary supplement of a Tehran daily paper. Rushdie the novelist was already at that time known in Iran, and a Persian translation of one of his previous novels had a little earlier been awarded a major Iranian literary prize for best translated novel of the year. The review of *The Satanic Verses* was deadly, but only in the figurative sense. Rushdie and his literary work may have been unknown to the Ayatollahs—it is unlikely that they follow the literary journals, but some of their advisers must surely have done so.

On February 12, 1989, the book was published in the United States. There is normally an interval of several months between the publication of an American book in England or of an English book in America. It is rather remarkable that, although the book was published in England in September 1988 and reviewed in Iran in November 1988, the major crisis broke when it was published in the United States, in February 1989. The Khomeini *fatwa* was issued two days later. One may wonder why it was the delayed American publication, not the original British publication, that constituted the offense calling for a sentence of death.

The *fatwa* evoked a variety of responses in the Muslim world. In Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, the American Cultural Center was attacked by a mob of enraged literary critics bent on deconstruction. Again, one wonders, why American? This was not an American book, not by an American author, but the work of a Muslim author of Indian birth, a citizen and resident of Britain.

On March 16, 1989, a group of Islamic foreign ministers, at a meeting of the Organization of Islamic States in Saudi Arabia, issued a statement denouncing the book and condemning its author as an apostate, *murtadd*. A Saudi official spokesman, commenting on this decision, pointed out that this was a resolution of a congress and not the decision of a court of law—a rather significant distinction. He further pointed out that even the resolution of the congress made no allusion to any death sentence.

What precisely was the offense of which Rushdie was accused? The charge is what in English we would call blasphemy. Specifically, it was the offense of insulting or abusing the Prophet, variously known as *sabb* and *shatm*, about which there is an extensive discussion in Muslim law books. Muslim law is based primarily on the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet *(hadith)*—that is to say, narratives handed down concerning the actions and utterances of the Prophet on various occasions. Where there is a clear and unequivocal ruling in the Qur'an or a generally accepted and unambiguous tradition, there is little if any room for difference of opinion. But in the course of time many differences of opinion arose among Muslims. There are some who accept, others who reject, a particular tradition, and even a generally accepted tradition may

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be differently interpreted. The major division is between Sunnis and Shi'a, who, though their theological differences are minimal, often diverge considerably on points of law. Even among the Sunni Muslims, there are different schools of law that recognize each other as orthodox and valid, but nevertheless sometimes take up different positions on important legal issues.

The law books cite a number of rulings and statements concerning the offense of abusing or insulting the Prophet. Normally, these discussions consider the case of a *dhimmi*—that is, a non-Muslim subject of the Muslim state, who insults the Prophet. On this the schools differ somewhat. The Hanafi school, which was followed in the Ottoman Empire and among a vast number of Muslims in Central Asia, South Asia, and elsewhere, generally took the position that if a *dhimmi* insulted the Prophet, he was to be punished by flogging or imprisonment or death or any combination of these, depending on the severity of the offense. There is some discussion about the severity of the offense—what made it severe and in what circumstances it constituted an offense. The general view among the Hanafi jurists was that it only constituted an offense if it was scandalous, public, and persistent. A chance remark thrown out in anger or in a moment of drunkenness did not count, or counted for very little. A prosecution for *sabb* was a very serious matter, involving major penalties, and according to the Hanafi jurists was not to be undertaken lightly. Some of them also insist that there must be witnesses who are free from malice or hostile intent. For Hanafi jurists it goes without saying that before anyone can be punished for this offense, he must be brought to trial, accused, and given the opportunity to defend himself.

The Maliki school, followed principally in Africa—in medieval times also in Muslim Spain and Sicily—takes a more severe view and would normally regard any such offense as capital. A *dhimmi* who insults the Prophet must be put to death. There is an interesting case that occurred in Tunis in 1857 of a Jewish *dhimmi* who insulted the Prophet while drunk. Normally, since Tunisia then had Hanafi law as its official code, he would have been brought before a Hanafi qadi and given a light sentence. In fact, the ruler insisted on sending him before a Maliki qadi, thus ensuring a death sentence. The reason was that a Muslim soldier had not long before been executed for robbing and murdering a Jew, and the ruler could not afford to be seen as more lenient to a Jewish blasphemer against the Prophet than to a Muslim.

What constitutes the offense of insulting the Prophet? Here again the jurists try to define carefully. The Hanafi jurists say, and the others do not disagree with them seriously on this point, that the unbeliever is not to be punished for "that which constitutes his unbelief." The *dhimmi* is

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known to be an unbeliever; he is allowed to live in the Muslim state as an unbeliever; he is not therefore punished for being an unbeliever. If the unbeliever says, "Muhammad is not a prophet," this does not constitute blasphemy or *sabb*. That is his belief; so much is known and accepted. If he abuses the Prophet—that is to say, applies dishonorable epithets to him—that is another matter.

The case of a Muslim who insults the Prophet is of course much more serious. From a non-Muslim, such an offense is a breach of the *dhimma* and is dealt with accordingly. But a Muslim who insults the Prophet is seen as an apostate, and apostasy is a capital offense in all schools of Muslim law. A Muslim who renounces Islam, whether for another religion or for none, or a convert to Islam who reverts to his previous religion, is to be sentenced to death. Some allow the possibility of remission of sentence after recantation, others do not allow even that. Recantation may save the apostate in the next world, but not in this.

I turn now to the question of jurisdiction. How is the case to be adjudicated and who has authority over the accused, to bring him to trial or to pronounce sentence? This raises the very important issue of the Muslim in a non-Muslim land. The world, according to Islamic law, is divided between the *Dar al-Islam* and the *Dar al-Harb*, the *Dar al-Islam*—the house of Islam—being that part of the world in which a Muslim government rules and Muslim law prevails. The rest of the world is the *Dar al-Harb*, the house of war. There is an intermediate category, which need not detain us now, as it has no bearing on this point. What is the legal position in Muslim law of a Muslim who is living outside the Islamic lands?

The first question is whether there should be Muslims living outside Islamic lands. On this the authorities have differed. Muslim law books devote a great deal of attention and discuss in very great detail the problems of the non-Muslim subject of the Muslim state. They devote only minimal attention and sometimes no attention at all to the problems of the Muslim subject of the non-Muslim state.

The reason for this is obvious. During the early centuries of Islamic history—that is, the formative period when the basic principles and norms of Islamic law were accepted, formulated, and committed to writing—the second question did not arise. The Islamic state was in a process of almost continuous expansion. Vast numbers of non-Muslims were being brought under Muslim rule, and there was no non-Muslim advance into Muslim territory. There were occasional, minor, temporary, tactical retreats, frontier adjustments and the like, but nothing of any great consequence. The problem of the non-Muslim ruler over Muslim subjects did not arise and was therefore not discussed, and probably would have been regarded as inconceivable and absurd at a time when

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it was generally assumed that the rapid expansion of Islam would continue without interruption until all the world was brought into the *Dar al-Islam*.

The problem of a Muslim in a non-Muslim land appears to have been first posed, theoretically, in the case of an unbeliever in the land of the unbelievers, who sees the light and embraces Islam. May he stay where he is, or must he go to a Muslim country? The Sunni answer is unequivocal—he must leave home and go to a country under Muslim authority and law. If he stays at home, he is failing in his duty. If his country is subsequently conquered by the advancing Muslims, his property may be treated as booty, like that of his unbelieving compatriots. The Shi'a view is the exact opposite. He should stay where he is to spread the light of Islam, and even if he fails and remains alone, then on the Day of Resurrection he will rank as a community all by himself.

A more frequent question was whether it is lawful for a Muslim to visit a non-Muslim land. Here the jurists differ somewhat. Most of them dislike the idea and regard it as bad, but are prepared to tolerate it in certain circumstances. Most or all allow a Muslim to visit a non-Muslim state in order to arrange the ransom or exchange of captives or prisoners. And so, for example, virtually every Moroccan ambassador's report from Europe, from the earliest times until at least the eighteenth century, is headed: "Report on a Mission for the Ransoming of Captives." This ensured that the mission was lawful, and protected both the envoy and the sovereign who sent him from possible charges.

There was some discussion among Maliki jurists in North Africa on whether it was permissible to go to Europe to buy foodstuffs in a time of shortage. Some said that in a time of real shortage, when the infidels have food and the Muslims do not, it is permissible to go. Others held that even then it was not permissible to go, because spending money in the land of the infidels meant strengthening them for the wars that they would certainly wage against the Muslims.

There was also the question, east rather than west of Islam, of small groups of merchants who went to settle for short periods for trade purposes in China, in India, in Central Asia, in Southeast Asia, where they were not subject to the rule of a rival religion, but in a sort of religiously neutral area. There is some discussion, again very brief, among Muslim jurists on this question.

The issue became urgent, and in a new form, with the advance of the reconquest in Europe—the recovery for Christianity, first of southern Italy and Sicily, and then of Spain and Portugal, which for the first time brought significant Muslim populations under the rule of Christian states. Now, the question that was asked was, "May they stay or must they go?" The virtually unanimous opinion of the Maliki jurists—and

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they were the only ones who faced this question since this was happening in the far west of Islam—was that they must go. It is not permissible for Muslims to remain under non-Muslim rule, and if their homeland is conquered by infidels, they must do what the Prophet did when he left Mecca and went to Medina. This migration—in Arabic *hijra*, commonly misspelled *hegira*—marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. There is a basic Muslim principle of seeing the Prophet as what we would nowadays call a role model. The phrase used in the Qur'an, *uswa hasana*, might reasonably be thus translated. Muslims must emulate the Prophet in all things, and just as the Prophet left his home in pagan Mecca and faced the risks, dangers, and difficulties of going to another and a strange place, so Muslims finding themselves under a non-Muslim ruler must pack their bags and go. Al-Wansharisi, a Moroccan jurist who in 1485 wrote a major *fatwa* on this question, lays down that migration from the land of unbelief to the land of Islam is an obligation until the Day of Resurrection. For a Muslim to remain under infidel rule is as bad as eating carrion or blood or pork, or committing murder. The questions and answers speak specifically of Christians, because that was the challenge they faced. The question was asked, "But if the Christian ruler is just and tolerant, what then?" According to al-Wansharisi, even if the Christians are just and tolerant, the Muslims must leave.

By his day this had become a largely hypothetical question, since the Christians were neither just nor tolerant in the countries that had been reconquered. During the centuries of the Spanish Reconquest, communities of Muslim subjects, known as *Mudejar*, probably from an Arabic term denoting tamed or domesticated animals, remained under Christian rule. The completion of the Reconquest in 1492 was followed, after an interval, by their enforced departure. An earlier—twelfth century—jurist, al-Mazari, a Tunisian of Sicilian origin, as his name indicates, from Mazara in Sicily, agrees in principle that when the non-Muslims have conquered their homeland—he is speaking of Sicily not of Spain—they must leave, but nevertheless finds a number of excuses to enable them to stay for the time being: if they are allowed to practice their religion without impediment; if they have reasonable hope of converting their new masters to Islam; even, if they are not aware of the law that requires them to go. Al-Mazari is obviously trying to be helpful, and indeed Muslims did stay for quite a while in Sicily under the relatively tolerant rule of the Normans, before they went and mostly relocated in North Africa. One finds similar, though less systematic, discussions in the East, in the areas of the Levant that were conquered and for a while held by the Crusaders.

Why did this matter? A reason sometimes cited is the repeated Qur'anic obligation imposed on Muslims "to enjoin good and forbid

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evil"—*al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-munkar.* A Muslim is required not merely to do good and avoid evil—personal choices that can be made anywhere. He is required to enjoin good and forbid evil, and that requires the exercise of authority. It is on that basis that some jurists argue that one can only be a good Muslim under a Muslim state. Others disagree.

The question of stay or go became more urgent and more frequent in the early modern centuries, first with the retreat of Ottoman power in Eastern Europe, and then with the expansion of the European empires. The first stage of the Ottoman retreat posed an agonizing choice for great numbers of Muslims, some of them Turkish speaking, some of them speaking the local languages, in the lands north of the Black Sea that were annexed by Russia during the eighteenth century, and in the Balkan Peninsula where province after province, country after country, was lost to the Ottomans and therefore lost to Islamic rule. Many left and were resettled in what is now Turkey and what are now the Arab states of the Fertile Crescent. There are many families in Turkey and in the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire today whose origins can be traced to places in what are now Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Greece. Others came from the countries conquered by the Russians: from the Caucasian lands, from the Crimea and Central Asia.

Interestingly, the term that was applied to them was *muhajir.* A *muhajir* is one who performs a *hijra,* and thus emulates the action of the Prophet. The term *refugee* was used in the Ottoman Empire for Christians or Jews who had fled from persecution in Europe and found refuge in the Ottoman lands. It was not used of Muslims who came from the lost provinces. They were not seen as refugees or as immigrants, but as fellow Muslims who had performed the religious obligation of *hijra.* Much more recently, the term has been applied to Muslims who left secular India to relocate in Islamic Pakistan.

The jurists discuss the plight of a Muslim among non-Muslims under several headings—the lone convert, the reluctant visitor, the unhappy victim of infidel conquest. The possibility of a Muslim who voluntarily goes to a non-Muslim land and stays there of his own free will was never considered by the classical jurists and was quite obviously unimaginable. Usama ibn Munqidh, a fascinating Syrian writer in the period of the Crusades, struck up a friendly relationship with a Frankish knight who was his neighbor. The knight one day offered to take Usama's fourteen-year-old son to Europe to "live among the knights and learn wisdom and chivalry." The suggestion was no doubt kindly meant, but Usama was shocked: "Words struck my ears such as would never come out of the head of a man of sense. If my son were taken captive no greater

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misfortune could befall him from his captivity than being taken to the land of the Franks." Voluntary migration was not an acceptable idea and did not take place until very recently.

By now there are very considerable numbers of Muslims who have migrated and settled in countries outside Muslim control—that is to say, where non-Muslim governments rule, and where the Muslim law, the *shari'a,* is not enforced. The argument sometimes adduced in defense of such migration is that the Prophet himself, while still in Mecca, permitted some of his companions to seek refuge in Christian Ethiopia from the persecution of the pagan Meccans. The weakness of this argument—as others have pointed out—is that there was no Muslim state in existence at that time, and that the Companions were fleeing from pagan to Christian rule, a clear improvement, and entirely unlike a migration to Christian from Muslim rule, which is the reverse.

Does the jurisdiction of Islamic law extend into countries where non-Muslim governments rule? Here again there is a clear difference between the juristic schools. The Hanafi school says no: the enforcement of Islamic law, the jurisdiction of an Islamic court are limited to the *Dar al-Islam.* Sarakhsi, one of the major Hanafi jurists of the medieval period, even gives an extreme formulation to emphasize his point. He says: If a Muslim traveling in the lands of the unbelievers commits robbery and murder and returns with his loot to the lands of Islam, he cannot be prosecuted for murder, nor can the property be touched, since this offense was committed outside the jurisdiction of Islam, and it is for the judicial authorities of the unbelievers to take action if they judge it appropriate and are able to do so. Muslim law and the Muslim judges are not concerned with what happens outside the realm of Islam. The Shi'a position is the exact opposite: that the jurisdiction of the Islamic law and of an Islamic legal authority is universal. Wherever there are Muslims, they are subject to Muslim law; they are bound to obey Muslim law; they may be punished for disobeying Muslim law. The other schools—that is to say, the other Sunni schools other than the Hanafis—vary, some inclining more to the Shi'a, some inclining more to the Hanafi view, some with various compromise positions between them. Some jurists, for example, say that a Muslim may be tried and punished for an offense that he commits in the land of the unbelievers, but only when he returns to the lands of Islam, not while he is still in the lands of the unbelievers. Khomeini's *fatwa* goes beyond even the most extreme of earlier Shi'ite rulings in that it also condemns those involved in the publication of the book; that is to say, it extends the jurisdiction of Islamic law, and the execution of its penalties, to infidels living in the lands of the infidels.

The Rushdie sentence raises another juridical question, that of trial and sentence. An offense is alleged to have been committed. A person is

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accused of having committed that offense. What is the legal position regarding prosecution and sentence? On this there are considerable differences among the juridical schools. The majority of Sunni jurists and a minority of Shiʿa jurists consider that arraignment and trial are necessary. Anyone who is accused of an offense must be brought to trial, told of the charges against him, confronted with the witnesses to his offense, and given the opportunity to defend himself, after which the judge will give a verdict, and, if appropriate, pronounce sentence. There is, however, another view, held by a majority of Shiʿa and a minority of Sunni jurists, that the offense of insulting the Prophet, particularly by a Muslim, is so utterly heinous that in the case of that offense one may, indeed one must, dispense with the formalities of trial and conviction and proceed directly to the execution.

This view, though primarily Shiʿite, is also held by a minority among the Sunnis, including the eastern Hanafis in Trans-Oxania and Central Asia. They cite texts and traditions, according to which the Prophet said, "If anyone insults me, then any Muslim who hears this must kill him immediately." And, some versions add, there is no need to refer to the imam or the sultan, meaning no need to obtain the approval of a higher authority, whether religious or political. Others take exactly the opposite view and say that such an action constitutes murder and should be punished as such, to which the more rigorist school replies: If a man carries out the sentence in this way and kills a blasphemer and then is himself killed, he will receive a martyr's reward in paradise. According to this view, then, summary and immediate execution is not only lawful but is obligatory, and those who do not do this are themselves committing an offense, which in English legal language might be called misprision of felony. A similar view is expressed in some legal texts, which require a Muslim actively to prevent the public commission of offenses such as drinking and revelry. On this point also Khomeini's *fatwa* and sentence go far beyond even the most rigorous jurists, who only require a Muslim to kill anyone who insults the Prophet in his hearing and in his presence. They say nothing about an arranged killing for a reported insult in a far place.

So much for the law. In the juridical and theological discussions of the case during the last year or so, principally in Iran, a number of historical precedents have been quoted. The Prophet is seen by Muslims as their guide and mentor, not only through revelation but also through his own actions and utterances. The difficulty is that some of the material purporting to relate to the Prophet's life is of questionable authenticity. Most of the biography is accepted by Muslims without question; but parts are regarded as legendary or problematic, with a rather vague and uncertain area between the two.

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Perhaps the most astonishing and extraordinary aspect of the whole controversy over the Rushdie affair during the last year is the effort that has been made by Iranian spokesmen, by searching through biographies of the Prophet, to prove by historical precedent that the Prophet both condoned and rewarded assassination, or even instigated it. After the battle of Badr in 624, between the Prophet and the Muslims on the one hand and the unbelievers on the other, it is told that two pagan Arab poets who had lampooned the Prophet were killed by their own kinsmen, hoping thereby to prove their loyalty to the Prophet. One of them, according to the narrative, was a very old man, said to be a hundred years old; the other was a young woman, indeed a nursing mother. No punishment was imposed, and no blood feud was incurred as a result of these killings. This is adduced as prophetic authorization for the sentence against Rushdie. Another case occurred after the capture of Mecca in 630, when a certain ʿAbdallah ibn Hilal ibn al-Khatal composed satirical poems attacking the Prophet, which were sung in public by two singing girls who were his slaves. One of the girls was executed, the other was pardoned.

A better-known example is Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, a poet and opponent of the Prophet, who was apparently the author of some widely circulated anti-Muslim verses. According to a narrative, the Prophet had let it be known that he would gladly be rid of Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, who was duly murdered. These particular cases have been repeated again and again, not to besmirch the Prophet by proving that he was an instigator of assassination, but to prove that instigating assassination is a good thing, because the Prophet did it. One is reminded of the famous story of the destruction of the library of Alexandria, which according to legend was destroyed by order of the caliph ʿUmar. There is ample evidence that nothing of the kind happened. This story was not, as has sometimes been suggested, a Christian invention to show that ʿUmar was a barbarian who burned libraries. It was a Muslim invention to show that destroying libraries could be a good thing, because ʿUmar did it. This story appears at the time of the dispersion of the heretical Fatimid libraries in Egypt, and its purpose was probably to justify something that was in itself unacceptable to a civilized people.

Perhaps the most heartening aspect of the otherwise rather depressing Rushdie affair is the response in many parts of the Islamic world, particularly in some of the Arab countries, to these events. The chief mufti of Egypt, in March 1989, stated quite clearly that, if Rushdie had committed the offense of which he was accused, he was liable to the death penalty, but there could be no execution without arraignment and trial. In many other countries, silence was eloquent. In countries where speech is often extremely dangerous, silence itself could be a very

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powerful expression of opinion. Possibly most remarkable was the action of a number of Syrian intellectuals living in Syria—not comfortably ensconced in some European or American university—who signed and published a manifesto in a Beirut newspaper denouncing the condemnation of Rushdie and the *fatwa*, the death sentence and the bounty.

The matter is not yet closed. The *fatwa* stands, and since its author is dead there is no one else who can abrogate it. The sentence still stands and has recently been reaffirmed, and it is unlikely that Mr. Rushdie will ever live a normal life again.

The *fatwa* has raised a number of very serious questions, which Muslims must confront. And of course, not only Muslims, since these matters affect many other people, too.

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Poems

WILLIAM STAFFORD

Tragedy

It happens. You knew it could.
No one ever said it wouldn't,
and now it has.

The world just goes on—the air
moves, trees keep on standing there and maybe
grieve a little, the sun stays steady.

All of this can't stop for a person,
no matter who, and the whole world
has to rock now and then but that's all.

So people come by to talk and help
if they can. They shake their heads helpfully.
"You'll get over it," they say.

And maybe, after years, you do,
or at least some of the time when
it's quiet, or during music, you almost do.

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A Few Words from The Little Woman

Do you mind if I tell you something? When you talk
and eat at the same time it makes me sick.
And recently your face looks bored.
Sorry to have to tell you this,
but I thought you'd like to know. For years
habits of yours, little things, have blighted
my days—your "Good *morning!*" Your
chopping motion when making a point. That dimple
you cultivate when you smile. Oh yes,
not important, but I so want to like you
and then these mannerisms come along.
I hope you don't mind. For long I held off
because you are so sensitive, but I know you want
to please me, and I like frankness, don't you?

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The Jewish Problem

(For Stanley Burnshaw)

KARL SHAPIRO

Every Jew has a Jewish problem, namely,
If you are a Jew and you're not paranoid, you're crazy.

Freud had the Jewish problem in spades,
Marx was the Typhoid Mary of the Jewish problem,
The grandpa of the Holocaust.

I once met a forester in California and I thought right off,
This fellow doesn't have a Jewish problem.

People ask me Have you been to Israel?
I answer No, and I have no intention of going;
This is a new Jewish problem.

I once published a book called Poems of a Jew
To get rid of my Jewish problem.
It only made it worse.

When people ask me about the Holocaust
I say, Tell it to Germany.

When the sun is over the yardarm and I mix my gin martini

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Or pour a glass of ruby Côte du Rhône,
I always say Boray pree ha gophen.

Achtung! Greek or Roman Christian,
Baptist Holy Roller in the dust,
Stop calling me Jew.

Achtung! Sunni or Shi'ite Moslem,
fondling your pineapple hand grenade,
Stop calling me Jew.

Achtung! Israeli or American,
Orthodox Conservative or Reform,
Stop calling me Jew.

Listen to me, believers of the faiths, this is my song:
America is Israel, nor am I out of it.

✪ KARL SHAPIRO is the author, most recently, of *New and Selected Poems* and *The Younger Son: Poet: An Autobiography*, Volume 1, and *Reports of My Death: An Autobiography*, Volume 2.

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Bakhtin and the Present Moment

GARY SAUL MORSON

CURRENT AMERICAN LITERARY THEORISTS love to celebrate "alterity"—otherness. It is therefore ironic that, when faced with a foreign cultural figure who had something genuinely different to say, these same theorists appear incapable of perceiving anything but the same tired formulas. Nowhere is this tendency toward homogenization more apparent than in the reception of twentieth-century Russia's greatest literary and cultural theorist, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin.

When Bakhtin's works first started to appear in English some two decades ago, an intense and unseemly competition began among various camps to package him. Despite his unremitting attacks on Formalism and structuralism, followers of Roman Jakobson—who had been active in both groups—initially claimed Bakhtin for both. It is as if Darwin had first been introduced to America as a Christian fundamentalist.

As structuralism began to ebb in the United States, a new post-structuralist, post-modern, deconstructionist Bakhtin was born. Thus, a thinker who spent his life trying to understand personal ethical obligation was presented as an antinomian or nihilist. No less odd, Bakhtin is routinely cited as a proponent of impersonalist "intertextuality" even though he insisted that dialogues (including those between authors and readers) are never a mere verbal exchange but are always a moral encounter of people and "a contact of personalities." He imagined people talking to each other; his followers write as if he had spoken, as they do, of language exchanging words with itself. In much the same way, Bakhtin's concept of "polyphony" in Dostoevsky's novels was assimilated by various schools of extreme relativism despite his explicit warnings against such a primitive confusion: "We see no special need to point out that the polyphonic approach has nothing in common with relativism (or with dogmatism). But it should be noted that both relativ-

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ism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism)."

Time and again, critics faced with the choice of either transmuting Bakhtin into a defender of current wisdom or abandoning him to "reactionary" enemy camps have chosen the first alternative, no matter how forced, distorted, or flagrantly absurd the results. None of these assimilations has been as problematic as the most recent one, which reflects the current, intensely political mood of American literary theory. As humanities departments have replaced the motto "there is nothing outside the text" with "there is nothing but power," Bakhtin has been discovered to be a Marxist. Even M. H. Abrams, who is far from an imitator of trends, has classed Bakhtin as a Marxist in his *Glossary of Literary Terms*. Given the sheer difficulty of supporting this position, one has to admire how successful this latest revision has proven.

Who was Bakhtin? His life was hardly exemplary for a supposed defender of the working class. The son of a bank manager and the product of a cultured family of liberal views, Bakhtin (1895–1975) appears to have spent the better part of his life hiding from the Party to escape arrest. After graduating from the University of Petrograd with a degree in classics and philology (1918), he retreated for the duration of the Russian Civil War to small towns, first Nevel and then Vitebsk (Chagall's hometown). There Bakhtin pursued his interests in religion and philosophy while writing not Marxist but Kantian or neo-Kantian treatises about individual (not class) ethical responsibility. When Bakhtin and his wife returned to Leningrad in 1924, his lack of political credentials and his bone disease (eventually leading to the amputation of his leg) left him unable to find stable employment. In 1929, he was arrested for alleged activity in the underground Russian Orthodox Church. His initial sentence to ten years in the Solovtesky Islands, which was tantamount to a death sentence, was commuted to six years internal exile in Kazakhstan, where he worked as a bookkeeper on a collective farm. In 1936, he began to teach at the fledgling Mordovia State Teachers College—a place as obscure as its name suggests—but when the rumors of the Great Purges reached him, he resigned to seek even greater obscurity. He did not return to his teaching job until the end of the Second World War.

By this time, Bakhtin had written a great deal but published very little. His one great success was a book issued in the 1920s, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Art*, which remains, by common consent, the most brilliant, if not necessarily the most accurate, study of that great novelist. Aside from the Dostoevsky book, he had published only a handful of essays. "Art and Responsibility" (1919), which has only just

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appeared in English, was a page long. Two essays on Tolstoy ape Marxist rhetoric so unsuccessfully that it is uncertain whether they are merely his worst work or an attempt at parody and oblique political critique. Another, written while he was in Kazakhstan, concerns the profitability of collective farms raising livestock.

But in the 1950s, a group of Moscow graduate students who knew the book on Dostoevsky discovered to their astonishment that its author had somehow survived the Stalinist night. At this point, Bakhtin became a cult figure in the characteristically Russian way, with "pilgrimages" organized to his home in Saransk, legends circulated about his wisdom and holy-foolishness, and people who should have known better falling at his feet as if he were a reincarnation of the Buddha (or Tolstoy). Permission was obtained to republish the Dostoevsky book, and so Bakhtin, evidently fearing he might not have another chance, added a great deal of not entirely relevant material from other works. Soon after, he was able to publish his doctoral dissertation on Rabelais, which had caused something of a scandal when it was first submitted. In the year of Bakhtin's death, a collection of his work "for the drawer" appeared, and it was this book that truly revealed his range and greatness as a thinker. Another remarkable collection was published in 1979, and an important early treatise on ethics came out in 1986. It is still unclear what works remain in the archives.

Those who want to describe Bakhtin as a Marxist understandably do not offer biographical evidence. And indeed it would be hard for them to pinpoint the time when this neo-Kantian proponent of individuality, open-ended dialogue, and historical unpredictability—perhaps even of some version of Russian Orthodoxy—could have accepted a class-based, materialist, and teleological account of life. He did not even pretend to do so. Under glasnost, Bakhtin's followers from Saransk have praised him—plausibly—as someone who refused to accept either a class-based account of morality or a sociologically relativist view of ethics.

Americans who claim Bakhtin for Marxism also leave unexplained why, from the 1930s on, when even Formalists filled their works with citations from the Marxist classics, Bakhtin not only refrained from doing so but even explicitly attacked Marxism. Reviewing the first edition of Bakhtin's Dostoevsky book in 1929, the Commissar of Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, suggested a way for Bakhtin to tie his thesis to Marxism, but when Bakhtin at last had a chance to reply in the 1963 edition, he rejected such explanations of literature in principle. He insisted that sociology (whether Marxist or not) can only describe conditions favoring a particular kind of literary creativity, but creativity itself, and the great works that result from it, necessarily exceed all "causal or genetic" explanations: "Poetics cannot, of course, be divorced

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from social and historical analyses, but neither can it be dissolved in them." Moreover, it is a mistake to treat Marxism as if it were the only or even a particularly good kind of social analysis. Economic materialism almost always leads to impoverishing analyses because it proceeds by correlating literature "with socioeconomic factors, as it were, behind literature's back."

But is it not possible to tie Bakhtin as a theorist of *dialogue* to Marxist *dialectics*? Did not Bakhtin's friend and colleague Valentin Voloshinov draw such a connection in his own work? As if foreseeing such a confusion, Bakhtin repeatedly contrasts dialogue with dialectics. For one thing, dialogue is open-ended; and for another, dialogue, unlike dialectics, is only possible among real, living people. The process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis can take place within a single consciousness, indeed within no specific consciousness, but dialogue requires at least two people, with their distinct experiences, perspectives, and voices. In its very spirit, dialectics, with its closure, abstractness, and assurance of history's outcome, is the very opposite of dialogue, which presupposes the possibility of what Bakhtin called "surprisingness."

In one draft essay, Bakhtin likened the dialectical process, whether Hegelian or Marxist, to "a thought that, like a fish in an aquarium, knocks against the bottom and the sides and cannot swim farther and deeper. Dogmatic thoughts." In some of his last notes, he acidly drew the contrast this way: "Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, then cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics."

I remember that as an undergraduate I was often impressed with Professor Victor Erlich's narrations of the tortuous reasoning used by hapless Soviet critics to force Russian classics by Pushkin, Tolstoy, Chekhov, and other non-Marxists into the approved Marxist framework. Erlich's refrain—"One has to sympathize with the critic" who had to find some way of arriving at the right conclusion—still rings for me with that special sort of irony that all Slavists learn to appreciate. And given the atmosphere of American criticism, perhaps I "have to sympathize" with Michael Holquist, the editor of most American translations of Bakhtin and the co-author of the only extant biography, in his just-published introduction to Bakhtin's early essays *(Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin).* Despite the obvious lack of Marxism in these writings on ethics and aesthetics, Holquist labors to render the great thinker acceptable by giving him the sort of Marxist credentials that are unnecessary today even in Russia.

"With the publication of these essays, then, the strategies by which

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Bakhtin might be appropriated to Marxism are complicated," Holquist concedes toward the end of his introduction. The needed solution, it turns out, is to be found in "two more areas of concern he [Bakhtin] shares with Marx: a quest for the deep structure of work and an attempt to grasp the relation of value to physical labor." Now, those who know Bakhtin's writings might find this statement puzzling because, as an anti-structuralist, he was hostile to the whole notion of "deep structures"; and, unless one is thinking of his contributions to agricultural accounting, he does not have a great deal to say about "physical labor." Holquist discovers such a concern in Bakhtin's writings on quotation and dialogue because there Bakhtin "conceives knowing as the *effort* of understanding" and speaks of interpretation as "active" reception.

> The adjective is all-important here: "*active* reception" means that quoting is never simply mechanical repetition, but constitutes *work*—it is a labor. A new book by James Lynch, director of the Psychophysiological Laboratory at the University of Maryland's medical school, provides evidence that calling dialogue "work" is not just a metaphor (or not only a metaphor): in a series of imaginative experiments, Lynch has shown a direct corollary between blood pressure levels and the activities of talking and listening.

Using the Holquist-Lynch test, this remarkable passage causes a great deal of work in its readers. But it labors in vain. For even if we should concede that raised blood pressure levels prove that a given activity is work and that dialogue is consequently laborious, is this labor in a Marxist sense? And is Marx the only one who ever wrote about work? One might just as well argue that Bakhtin's writings on active reception prove that he adhered to the Protestant ethic and endorsed capitalism.

If I have dwelled on such reasoning, it is because Bakhtin understood the impulse that leads to it (in its more as well as less profound forms). He knew that, with suitable variations, this sort of thinking is characteristic of a certain common type of theoretically inclined mind, and he devoted the better part of his intellectual life to warning against its abuses and to providing rewarding alternatives. In short, a good first step to understanding Bakhtin's work is to speak not of "Bakhtin *and* Current Literary Theory," as most critics do, but of "Bakhtin *versus* Current Literary Theory."

In his early writings, Bakhtin coined the term "theoretism" for the theoretical mentality he rejected. Later in his career he referred to "monologism" and "dogmatism" as well. What he had in mind was the type of thinking that first abstracts from concrete human actions all that is generalizable, then transforms the abstractions into a system governed by a set of rules, next derives norms from those rules, and finally denies that anything of significance has been left out in the process. The world

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according to such thinkers is imagined to consist of three sorts of things: first and most important, *rules* or laws, which it is the scholar's prime role to discover; second, mere *instantiations* of those rules—that is, concrete events—which are of interest only as confirmation of the rules; and last, perhaps grudgingly conceded, some *residue* of phenomena for which rules have not yet been found or that are too inconsequential to be of any interest. Exemplifying theoretism for Bakhtin was Saussurean linguistics, which lies at the base of Formalism, structuralism, and ultimately of post-structuralism. Bakhtin objected to its division of language into the system of rules *(langue)* and their mere instantiation *(parole)*, while proposing that linguists study only *langue* because everything else is either an instantiation of *langue* or too formless a residue for serious investigation. Bakhtin detected essentially the same pattern in the other great *-isms* of the twentieth century, Freudianism and Marxism. In the attempt to assimilate life and thought to such models, he saw a misunderstanding, if not a betrayal, of the proper role of the humanities.

In Bakhtin's view, all the great modern systems, despite their variety, share a fundamental imperative. Their "sad misunderstanding," as Bakhtin writes, is "that truth can only be that sort of truth that is put together out of general moments, that the truth of a proposition is precisely what is repeatable and constant in it." The great *-isms* assume that everything, to use Bakhtin's pejorative term, is subject to "transcription" (generalized description by a set of impersonal laws). They consequently overlook that in human life what is often most important, what usually contains the soul of activity and the meaning of events, lies precisely in what cannot be transformed into rules or generalities. Real life, true historicity, and genuine individuality are to be found in what is *left over*—in what Bakhtin called the "surplus"—after all rules are applied and all generalizations have been exhausted. In that surplus we find "the singular world in which we create, become aware, in which we live and in which we die." Or, as he sometimes put the point, theoretism necessarily loses the *eventness* of events. For Bakhtin, it is precisely an understanding of eventness and "the surplus," of all that makes our lives and our decisions particular and "unrepeatable," that defines the role of the humanities as a discipline.

For Bakhtin, a key problem that could serve as the acid test for theoretism is creativity. Theoretism can never think about creativity without thinking it away. For it is apparent that great systems reduce creative acts to the set of circumstances that occasioned them and to the operation of laws supposedly leading to them. But what is creative if a set of laws can specify a given outcome? Thus, the Russian Formalist Osip Brik, who claimed that the Formalists had discovered the laws of literary history, wrote that it is the system of literature that produces

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great works. "There are no poets and writers," he wrote, "there are only poetry and literature. . . . If there were no Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin* would have been written all the same. America would have been discovered even without Columbus." Marxism and Freudianism—indeed all sociologisms and psychologisms—also, in the final analysis, reduce creativity to mere discovery because in principle they cannot allow for real *choice* and meaningful uncertainty of outcome. Their devotion to timeless laws and norms precludes the attribution to any particular moment of the potential for the unforeseen and the weight of real, irreducible significance.

An analogous test applies to ethics, the other topic that concerned Bakhtin throughout his intellectual career. Here the test of theoretism is whether the moment of the ethical act has the same sort of irreducibility possessed by an act of creativity. For ethical choice is truly *momentous*. If the ethical issue in question is at all complex, it cannot be decided in advance on the basis of some transcription of the supposedly salient facts. Too much, too many particulars whose importance might not be apparent to the best and most philosophically informed transcriber, would be left out. In the final analysis, nothing substitutes for *presence* at the occasion of ethical choice. In *Anna Karenina*, when Levin is challenged to say whether he would use violence to prevent a Turkish soldier from killing a Bulgarian baby, he replies that he does not know, that he would have to decide *at that very moment* on the basis of criteria he cannot enumerate in advance. His half-brother, a prominent intellectual, can only laugh at Levin's inability to state his principles, but for Tolstoy this sensitivity to real people and real particulars is the key to moral choice. In the hypothetical situation Levin is asked to face, the unforeseeable particularities are too important and the consequences of a wrong decision too terrible for him to abdicate choice to a set of abstract and easily describable rules. Or as Bakhtin stated this point: "There is no alibi for being." Theoretism cannot in any real sense appreciate the "non-alibi."

Bakhtin repeatedly stressed that, although norms and rules are often helpful, ultimately ethics is a matter of sensitivity to particular cases. Bakhtin, we might say, was a casuist in the root sense of the term—that is, one who insists on the specifics of each case. In this sense, he maintained that all humanistic disciplines are by their very nature casuistical. For example, he believed that literary interpretation was in principle not reducible to a method, modern literary theory notwithstanding. When Bakhtin described the nature of historicity or the irregular pulse of "real historical time," he reasoned that no system could ever account for the wealth of tradition, the prosaic messiness of the present, and the openness of the future. He would entirely have

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agreed with Tolstoy's observation in *War and Peace*: "If we concede that human life can be governed by reason, then the possibility of life is destroyed."

In developing his influential dialogic model of the psyche, Bakhtin therefore attacked all schools—whether Freudian, Pavlovian, or what we would call sociobiological—that aspire to explain all behavior in "causal or genetic" terms. To Bakhtin, such approaches deny freedom, responsibility, and creativity—in short, they leave no place for everything that constitutes what he called the "living core" of personality. The proper sort of psychological understanding (which Bakhtin attributed to Dostoevsky) begins with a recognition of that living core, whereas the wrong sort regards it as a stumbling block to "scientific" explanation. Encountering it, the theoretist-as-psychologist seeks to "substitute [for this living core] a sort of ready-made definitiveness . . . predetermined in all its words and acts by 'psychological laws.' "

According to Bakhtin, it was precisely this type of thinking that Dostoevsky meant to reject. Praised in his own time and after (by Freud, among others), as the greatest psychologist that literature has ever produced, Dostoevsky himself declared, amazingly enough, that "I am not a psychologist." For Bakhtin, this famous and perplexing self-characterization, along with Dostoevsky's satires on "psychologists" in *The Brothers Karamazov*, makes perfect sense—the same sort of sense that it made for the world's greatest psychological thinker to express himself not in treatises or scientific papers but in novels. If Freud described artists such as Dostoevsky as intuitively wise but unable to state directly what they understood, Bakhtin saw the turn to novels as the best way to communicate a vision of people as freely responding to complex specific situations.

Bakhtin eventually came to regard the novel—the great realist novel of Dostoevsky, George Eliot, Goethe, and Tolstoy—as the supreme achievement of Western thought because the novel, more than any other literary or non-literary form, respects the particularity of context, the eventness of events, and the uniqueness of personality. He consequently never thought that literary criticism was more important than the works it describes. Viewing his own writings as nothing more than "transcriptions" of ultimately untranscribable novelistic wisdom, he described his book on Dostoevsky as, at best, an indication of where the reader might look for what criticism cannot capture: "I translate into the language of an abstract worldview that which was the object of concrete and living artistic visualization and which then became a principle of form," he reminds himself in his notes for revising the Dostoevsky book. "Such a translation is always inadequate."

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II

Bakhtin and the Russian Counter-Tradition

As the examples I have selected from Russian literature indicate, Bakhtin's theories—or anti-theories—develop a particular line of Russian thought, what I like to call the counter-tradition of nineteenth-century Russian literature. This counter-tradition, in its time the minority voice, has taken on new resonance in Gorbachev's Russia, now that the disastrous consequences of the majority tradition must be faced. The counter-tradition sounds more and more like the voice not heeded.

The majority tradition—the "Russian Idea," as it was sometimes called—expressed the predominant mood of the emerging radical intelligentsia. The word *intelligentsia*, as it happens, was coined in nineteenth-century Russia, where it originally described not just a group of people who live by ideas but a group that thought in a particular style. Thus, many people who in America might be considered members of the intelligentsia—for example, a moderately liberal professor who was appointed to public office—would have been excluded when the term was coined. The real intelligentsia, from Belinsky to Lenin, was composed largely of the various types of fanatics that populate Dostoevsky's and Turgenev's novels. They were *The Possessed.*

One recognizes this dominant style of Russian thought by three qualities: extremism, totalism, and messianism. A system is discovered that explains absolutely everything, and a method is provided for solving all the "accursed questions" and remedying every human ill. Create socialism, reunite all Eastern Orthodox Christians, or exterminate the Elders of Zion, and then welcome the millennium. "I am perplexed by my own data and my conclusion is a direct contradiction of the original idea with which I start," the fanatic Shigalyov tells a meeting of radicals in *The Possessed.* "Starting from unlimited freedom, I arrive at unlimited despotism. I will add, however, that there can be no solution of the social problem but mine." One reason *The Possessed* has been suppressed in the Soviet Union is that Shigalyov and other characters seem to anticipate with uncanny accuracy Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

In addition to Bolshevism and messianic anti-Semitism, various forms of fatalism and politically tinged mysticism have arisen within the tradition of "the Russian Idea." In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy describes Pierre Bezukhov's numerological proof that Napoleon is the Antichrist and that the Antichrist is destined to be defeated by someone whose name has the numerical value of the beast of the Apocalypse. Transliterating his own name into French and rendering it only slightly ungrammatically as "L'russe Besouhof," Pierre discovers that it adds up to 666

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and, therefore, that he, Pierre, is the one destined to defeat the Antichrist and save the world. As readers understood, this portrait, though somewhat anachronistic for a nobleman of 1812, constituted Tolstoy's satire on the Russian intelligentsia of his own time. Dostoevsky parodied the demand for a comprehensive answer to all questions when he had his man from the underground foresee a time when all the laws of nature would be discovered and "all human actions will then, of course, be tabulated according to these laws, mathematically, like tables of logarithms to 108,000 and entered in a table; or better still there would be published certain edifying works like the present encyclopedic lexicons, in which everything will be so clearly calculated and designated that there will be no more incidents and adventures in the world." Bakhtin may have had this very passage in mind when he coined the term "eventness."

Much of Bakhtin's distrust of extreme relativism probably derives from his association of it with yet another voice in the chorus of the majority tradition, the voice of nihilism and antinomianism. The Russian experience made it amply clear to him that the rejection of all tradition and all norms is not an alternative to, but the simple mirror image of, the more usual types of totalitarian dogmatism. Tradition, so long as it is not understood as completed, does not destroy but creates potentials; and relativism, despite its intoxication with rejecting prejudices, makes serious choices impossible. That is what Bakhtin meant by equating absolute relativism with absolute dogmatism. For Bakhtin, as for Dostoevsky, an extreme relativist is someone who—like Ivan Karamazov or Stavrogin—agrees that meaningful knowledge could only be a system of laws but denies that such laws exist. In that case, "all is permitted," but nothing is worth doing, except, perhaps, suicide. Ambrose Bierce quipped in *The Devil's Dictionary* that a nihilist is "a Russian who denies the existence of everything except Tolstoy" (or whoever else was the favored teacher of the moment).

Dostoevsky also caught the logic that connects extremism with nihilism or absolute relativism when he observed that a Russian intellectual is someone who can read Darwin and conclude he should become a pickpocket. In much the same spirit, a character in Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* reminds his hopelessly indebted friends that according to Nietzsche it is moral to forge banknotes. The devil who visits Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* offers the best reply to this kind of thinking: "That's all very charming; but if you want to swindle why do you want a moral sanction for doing it? But that's our modern Russian [intellectual] all over."

It was probably the very extremism of this tradition that led to the development of a remarkable counter-tradition of thinkers who ques-

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tioned its predominant premises and proposed possible alternatives. These skeptical thinkers recognized the importance of the particular; redirected attention to all that does not fit systems; saw the danger of forcing final solutions to problems that were by their very nature open; and argued that the incompatibility of differing sets of values may be both unresolvable and even, at times, desirable. To use Sir Isaiah Berlin's famous distinction, the counter-traditional thinkers were not hedgehogs but foxes.

These counter-traditional thinkers were therefore simultaneously anti-utopian and anti-relativist. Some of them, in questioning the intelligentsia's attraction to universal explanatory systems and salvational political schemes, wondered whether there might not be something about the way members of the intelligentsia—*any* intelligentsia—defined their identity that had the constant potential for catastrophe. Others, like Anton Chekhov, seemed to be angered most by the intelligentsia's self-indulgence, as, with a pose of moral and intellectual superiority, they engaged in an unseemly competition for recognition as "the destined victim of the age" (to cite a character in his novella *The Duel*). In a rather typical letter, the author of *Uncle Vanya* and *The Three Sisters* expressed frustration with "the indolent, apathetic, lazily philosophizing, cold intelligentsia who can't even think up on its own a model for a document of credit . . . who grumbles and negates everything, since for an idle mind it is easier to negate than affirm . . . and all this on strength of the fact that life has no meaning . . . or that money is an evil." Such figures populate Chekhov's stories and plays, which were often attacked in consequence.

Though in no sense anti-intellectual, some of these thinkers might properly be called *anti-intelligentsial.* In fact, the reminder that intellectuals need not be (radical) *intelligentsials* was a key theme of one remarkable expression of the Russian counter-tradition, a collection of essays attacking the intelligentsia and its mystique of revolution. Published in 1909, the anthology *Landmarks: A Collection of Articles about the Russian Intelligentsia* accused the intelligentsia of irresponsibility, of a sanctimonious and lazy belief that the further left one is the more noble one is, of "inner slavery" produced by materialism and adherence to abstractions, and of a tendency to evaluate ideas on the basis not of their truthfulness but of their political effectiveness. Allegiance to grand ideas concealed narrowness of mind and pettiness of daily behavior. Sounding much like Chekhov, the anthology's editor, Mikhail Gershenzon, aroused the most violent criticism with his description of the baneful effects of the intelligentsia:

> A handful of revolutionaries has been going from house to house, knocking at every door, shouting "Out into the streets, everyone. You ought to be ashamed of

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sitting at home." And all living creatures poured into the town square, the lame, the blind, and the halt, not one of them stayed at home. For half a century they have remained in the square, jostling one another and exchanging abuse. At home there is dirt, beggary, and disorder—but what does the householder care about that? He's out in the world, saving the people—and of course that is easier and more entertaining than doing the household chores at home.

Perhaps even more like Chekhov and Bakhtin was Pyotr Struve, who reminded the intelligentsia that it needed precisely what it lacked—the capacity for hard work, for economic development, and for gradual spiritual improvement. Conversely, its principal failings derive from its "conception that the progress of a society is a stake to be won at the gambling tables of history by appealing to the aroused masses, and not the fruit of the perfection of individual men." Vehemently denounced, by Lenin among others, *Landmarks* was not published in post-revolutionary Russia until 1990, when it was hailed by the liberal *Moscow News* as justified by subsequent history. Bakhtin is best understood as a thinker in the Russian counter-tradition from which *Landmarks* emerged.

Very much in the spirit of *Landmarks*, the young Bakhtin criticized those thinkers who achieve their sense of personal identity by—ironically enough—sacrificing it to some larger whole, to a great religious, political, or philosophical system and to an organization that carries its message. Like the humanity described by Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, Bakhtin observed, such people lose their "singularity" and "nonalibi" by allowing the organization to make their moral choices for them. (Written in the early 1920s, the allusion to the Communist party is almost unmistakable.) In an important sense, such people do not live real, but merely "represented," lives because their selves become nothing but "representatives of some large whole."

In the long run, I think, this counter-tradition represents the most durable Russian contribution to Western thought. Bakhtin might best be understood as its greatest critic, as the most profound "transcriber" of counter-traditional wisdom. Beginning with Alexander Herzen's skeptical political dialogues, this line of thought inspired, among other works, Tolstoy's two great novels, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* (although not his late religious tracts) and, as we have seen, Chekhov's major plays and stories. One of the shortcomings of Bakhtin's readings of Dostoevsky is his tendency to see his favorite writer as almost exclusively counter-traditional. He consistently overlooks Dostoevsky's tendency to succumb to the very intelligentsial vices satirized in his own novels.

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III

Consciousness from Within and at Second Hand

Bakhtin so loved Dostoevsky because he saw in him the writer who most palpably and realistically captured the very feel of human freedom. Earlier writers had brilliantly represented the effects of freedom and its consequences for a person as viewed from without. In Bakhtin's odd terminology, they had discovered appropriate ways to represent "soul" (a person's external image). But it was Dostoevsky who first created a way to communicate the throb of freedom *as it is experienced from within* in the open-ended moment of choice ("spirit," or a person's internal experience). "Dostoevsky made spirit . . . the object of aesthetic contemplation, he was able to *see* spirit in a way which previously only the body and soul of man could be seen." As a result, when we follow a hero in Dostoevsky's novels, "we do not see who he is, but *how* he is conscious of himself."

Consciousness—not the unconscious—was precisely the focus of Bakhtin's own psychological theories, as well as of Dostoevsky's as Bakhtin described them. In Bakhtin's view, the best way to overcome simplistic models of consciousness is not to consign all complexity to a hypothetical unconscious, but—as Tolstoy also believed—to develop a more complex model of consciousness. Bakhtin's hostility to the very spirit of Freudianism is another feature of his thought that distinguishes him from current American critical theory. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky "moved aesthetic visualization . . . not into the depths of the unconscious; rather into the depths of the heights of consciousness. . . . Consciousness is much more terrifying than any unconscious complexes."

More than accuracy to the actual workings of the psyche is at stake here. Bakhtin and Dostoevsky insisted that to the extent that one reduces the significance of conscious choice, moral freedom and responsibility also disappear. Real agency is handed over to

> forces that lie outside consciousness, externally (mechanistically) defining it: from environment and violence to miracle, mystery, and authority. Consciousness under the influence of these forces loses its authentic freedom, and personality is destroyed. There among these forces, must one consign the unconscious (the "id").

"Miracle, mystery, and authority" was, of course, the Grand Inquisitor's phrase for the various temptations to surrender freedom and thus remove

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from oneself the burden of responsibility. For Bakhtin, Freudianism was itself such a temptation, and he would not have been the least surprised to learn of all those American movements that, having embraced Freudian concepts, have increasingly preferred to describe more and more behavior in terms of conditions and diseases rather than morally responsible choices.

To "see spirit," to show how the throb of consciousness feels as it makes decisions "on the threshold" and in "the cross-section of a single moment," Dostoevsky first had to understand human freedom in all its richness and immediacy. That understanding involved, first of all, an appreciation of what Bakhtin called "*that internally unfinalizable something in man.*" *Unfinalizability* was a key concept for Bakhtin. Dostoevsky's characters all acutely sense their own unfinalizability—that is, "their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render *untrue* any externalizing and finalizing definition of them. As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word."

Because they are unfinalizable, people can surprise others and themselves by making choices that no psychologist or sociologist, no biographer or external observer, regardless of their prior factual or theoretical knowledge, could wholly predict. And since choices do not just reflect who we are but also mold who we become, our identity, as well as our actions, cannot be established entirely from without. Such unpredictability is essential to being human. It reflects a defining feature of people, what Bakhtin calls their *non-coincidence*:

> A man never coincides with himself. One cannot apply to him the formula of identity A ≡ A. In Dostoevsky's artistic thinking, the genuine life of the personality takes place at the point of non-coincidence between a man and himself, at his point of departure beyond the limits of all that he is as a material being, a being that can be spied on, defined, predicted apart from his will, "at second hand." The genuine life of the personality is made possible only through a *dialogic* penetration of that personality, during which it freely and reciprocally reveals itself.

Such passages exemplify the way Bakhtin, in spite of his wordiness, clumsiness, and idiosyncratic neologisms, could achieve a kind of ungainly eloquence. In that respect, perhaps, he resembles Dostoevsky, whom no one has ever called a great stylist, but who at times achieves rhetorical power beyond the great stylists.

The passage about "non-coincidence" leads directly into the overtly ethical argument of Bakhtin's Dostoevsky book. It is ultimately immoral, as well as profoundly insulting, to treat a person as not unfinalizable—as

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someone, that is, who can be defined from without, "at second hand." Dostoevsky's characters keenly sense this immorality and this insult, whether the external definition is given as the analyst's psychological insight or a determinist's mastery of the "laws of nature." (This is the explanation of the underground man's paradoxical comment that he has always been insulted by the laws of nature.) To treat someone as human is to treat him as capable of surprise.

The right way to talk about other people is to talk with them, to address them in a spirit of dialogue so that they can freely reveal themselves. Even a prediction that proves true may be insulting, because it suggests that things could not have worked out otherwise. "The truth about a man in the mouths of others, not directed to him dialogically and therefore a *secondhand* truth, becomes a *lie* degrading and deadening him, if it touches upon his 'holy of holies,' that is, 'the man in man.' " Bakhtin cites the passage in *The Brothers Karamazov* describing Alyosha's complex and well-intended psychological account of the insulted Captain Snegiryov, whom he predicts will take charity if it is offered again, after the captain has preserved his dignity by decisively rejecting it. Alyosha's friend, Liza, for all her appreciation of his desire to help, objects strenuously to such secondhand certainty:

> Listen, Alexy Fydorovich. Isn't there in all our analysis—I mean your analysis . . . no, better call it ours—aren't we showing *contempt* for him, for that poor man—*in analyzing his soul like this*, as it were, *from above*, eh? In deciding so *certainly* that he will take the money? (italics Bakhtin's)

It follows—for Bakhtin as well as for Dostoevsky—that any account of people that is either deterministic, made at second hand without dialogic address, or unappreciative of the possibility of surprise in the immediate future precludes true ethics.

IV

The Surplus of Humanness

The importance of the *immediate future*—the time we must consider in making moral choices and exercising our freedom responsibly—became central to one of Bakhtin's most interesting concepts, the "chronotope" (literally, time-space). He developed this idea in two erudite works, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics" and "The Novel of Education and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of

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the Novel)," the latter evidently the only surviving fragment of a book on Goethe's contribution to the novel. Despite their neologisms and bewildering classification schemes, Bakhtin's chronotope writings start from a basic idea that is as simple as it is profound: in various spheres of life, and in different literary genres, time is experienced in different ways. And because people act in time, different temporalities create a multiplicity of ways to understand human nature.

As a trained classicist, Bakhtin characteristically chose to elucidate his concept historically, by tracing the way various ancient narrative forms represented human agency and how more recent genres, especially the novel, enriched those representations. Each genre has its own "chronotope," by which Bakhtin meant a specific and above all *concrete* sense of how individual agency, historical context, and social milieu interact. Or, to put the point differently, genres are not just empty forms but are ways of conceptualizing the shape of time and "the image of a person." In each genre, "time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" in a particular way.

Some of these ways are less profound, some more so; some allow for individual freedom, others represent people as passive sports of chance; different degrees and kinds of growth, surprise, and historical depth shape the action of various types of narrative. Only the simplest of these concrete conceptualizations can be "transcribed" into abstract philosophical descriptions. The most complex, which are untranscribable, embody some of humanity's greatest and most elusive wisdom. Developed over centuries of "great time," these genres are rich in possibilities for future insights.

Or we might approach the concept of chronotopes this way: we all know from experience that different criteria of probability and types of causality govern distinct narrative forms. For this reason, we expect miracles in biblical tales or saints' lives that are ruled out of realistic novels or academic histories. Heroes of adventure stories tend to be rescued in the nick of time, but works like *Eugénie Grandet* or *Middlemarch* are set in a time "without nicks."

In some forms, beginning with the modern novel of education, people truly grow and initiate change in themselves, whereas in others (such as ancient biographies), all they can do is manifest qualities that they possessed from the start. In Greek romances and in Plutarch's *Lives*, people develop like a plant from a seed: social context can favor or impede growth, but what one can become has been decided in advance. An Alexander the Great might be prevented from becoming a conqueror, but he will not therefore develop into an orator. By contrast, people in *Anna Karenina* have multiple potentialities. If they sometimes say

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otherwise, and see themselves as governed by implacable fate, they misunderstand the world in which they live (perhaps because they, like Don Quixote or Madame Bovary, have read too much of the wrong kind of fiction).

In the great realist novels, people truly change bit by bit; they are essentially shaped both by their own decisions and by their reactions to the historical milieu; and that milieu itself gradually alters in surprising ways, thus creating new possibilities for individuals and the culture as a whole. Or, to use Bakhtin's terms, in the realistic novel people and their society undergo "genuine becoming" as they impinge upon each other. This mutual shaping of individual and social development gives us a world that is truly "unfinalizable" in all its respects.

In a novel, people are capable of true ethical responsibility and creativity because the past shapes, but does not exhaustively define, them. Readers of a novel intuitively feel that, had circumstances varied and had the hero made different choices, he would not only have faced other consequences but would also have become a somewhat different person. The possibility of gradual but essential transformation never disappears for major characters; and the awareness of that possibility conditions the experience of reading a novel as surely as it is ruled out for readers of romances, adventure stories, utopias, saints' lives, and numerous other genres. In short, "the individual [in the novel] is either greater than his fate or less than his condition as a man. He cannot become once and for all a clerk, a landowner, a merchant, a fiancé, a jealous lover, a father and so forth." Each person and each situation has unrealized *potential*, or the capacity to develop in many directions other than the one realized. The plot of a novel is sensed as one of many possible plots, which is one reason that some novelists—Balzac, Trollope, Tolstoy—are able to re-introduce the same characters in various novels.

Potential, or the capacity for various outcomes, became another one of Bakhtin's key concepts. He found it in people, circumstances, history, and literary works. He ultimately came close to saying that what makes great works great is the kind and amount of potential they possess, a position that clearly sets him apart from modern theorists who deny that works intrinsically "possess" anything and therefore make value entirely dependent on the interests of a given reader at the moment of reading.

As Bakhtin's dense and cryptic terminology developed, the term *potential* came to represent the single most important quality that, by its very nature, the various forms of theoretism could never grasp. To be sure, dynamic forms of structuralism, Formalism, and materialism (dialectical or other) propose to account for change, but their attachment to

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systems or laws and their distrust of particularity, choice, and eventness turn history into a mere shadow of itself. "Genuine becoming" is replaced by mechanical and predictable *unfolding*, while creativity reduces to discovery—or, as the underground man would say, to "the extraction of square roots." Just as the right answer to a mathematical problem takes time to discover but is not itself shaped by time, so history in all theoretist models rules out "event-potential"—the potential for our choices to produce meaningfully different outcomes.

For Bakhtin, it is always ultimately people, not systems, who choose, create, and take responsibility. We matter. In his earliest writings, Bakhtin phrased this point in ethical terms: "That which can be accomplished by me cannot be accomplished by anyone else, ever." Later, he wrote disparagingly of theoretists' adherence to primitive chronotopes when much more sophisticated ones are available.

In the wisest narrative genre, the novel, pre-given laws can never account for all change, and characters who reject the reality of choice—we might think of Bazarov in Turgenev's *Father and Sons*—soon face difficult ones they can neither elude nor deny. We might say that, in general, the intellectual heroes of the great Russian novels learn negative lessons: that unpredictability is not just a measure of our temporary ignorance of laws, that wisdom cannot be reduced to theoretical knowledge, and that attentiveness to particular people and contexts reveals riches that no system could imagine. Symbolically, as Konstantin Levin attains wisdom near the end of *Anna Karenina*, he realizes that if he listens and watches very carefully he can actually perceive the growth of particular blades of grass.

In understanding temporality better than the ideologists ever could, the great Russian novelists also understood people better. Marxism is the most obvious implied target of Bakhtin's impassioned account of life as the novel represents it and as it truly is:

> An individual cannot be completely incarnated into the flesh of existing socio-historical categories. There is no mere form that would be able to incarnate once and forever all of his human possibilities and needs, no form in which he could exhaust himself down to the last word . . . no form that he could fill to the very brim, and yet at the same time not splash over the brim. There always remains an unrealized surplus of humanness; there always remains a need for the future, and a place for this future must be found. All existing clothes are always too tight, and thus comical, on a man. . . . Reality as we have it in the novel is only one of many possible realities; it is not inevitable, not arbitrary, it bears within itself other possibilities.

In the Dostoevsky book, Bakhtin expresses the thought this way:

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"Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is in the future and will always be in the future."

The temporal focus of attention in the novel is therefore the "inconclusive present" leading into the immediate future. In this respect, the novel differs markedly from other genres. The epic, for instance, regards the present in which the poem is sung as unimportant as compared to the "absolute past" (the term is Goethe's and Schiller's) in which epic action took place. The source of all values, the home of all "firsts" and "bests," and the measure of all actions to follow, the epic's absolute past is understood not just as a long time ago but as a different *kind* of time from the one in which singer and audience live. For epic, the present is merely "something transitory, it is flow, it is [merely] an eternal continuation without beginning or end; it is denied an authentic conclusiveness and consequently lacks an essence as well." Likewise, the future is perceived "as an essentially indifferent continuation of the present."

The novelistic sense of "presentness" differs still more radically from that of utopian historical models. (Again, the allusion to Marxism is obvious.) The teleological promise of perfection (or disaster, for that matter) devalues the present and "bleeds the substance" out of the immediate future into which we live. It therefore removes the "momentousness" of our ethical decisions and our daily lives. Utopia or eschatology "always sees the segment of the future separating the present from the end as lacking value; this separating segment of time loses its significance and interest, it is merely an unnecessary continuation of an indefinitely prolonged present."

We can appreciate the political explosiveness of this passage if we recognize that it apparently echoes an earlier thinker in the Russian counter-tradition, Alexander Herzen. In *From the Other Shore*, a remarkable set of dialogues and essays reflecting on the failure of the 1848 revolutions, Herzen stressed the danger that revolutionaries might devalue and regard as "unnecessary" the real people who live in the present:

> If progress is the end, for whom are we working? Who is this Moloch who, as the toilers approach him, instead of rewarding them, only recedes, and as a consolation to the exhausted, doomed multitudes . . . can give back only the mocking answer that after their death all will be beautiful on earth. Do you truly wish to condemn all human beings alive today to the sad role . . . of wretched galley slaves, up to their knees in mud, dragging a barge filled with some mysterious treasure and with the words "progress in the future" inscribed on its

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bows? . . . This alone should serve as a warning to people: an end that is infinitely remote is not an end, but if you like, a trap; an end must be nearer—it ought to be, at the very least, the laborer's wage, or pleasure in the work done.

Revolutionaries act in the name of humanity, of people in general, but, as Bakhtin points out, "there is no person in general, there is me, there is a definite concrete other: my close friend, my contemporary (social humanity), and the past and future of real people (of real historical humanity)." It is not hard to see why Russians today are listening with special interest to the voices of their counter-tradition. And it is also clear why concepts as apparently technical as "chronotope" or "presentness" are acquiring such resonant importance.

V

Passing Judgments

If one is to understand Bakhtin, it is important to stress one thing he emphatically did not mean by the importance of the present moment. He disdained the tendency, enshrined in official Soviet criticism and now the rule in American academic theory, to pass judgment on past eras and writers by measuring them against the political or moral standards of today. Those who are not literature professors and who graduated from universities more than half a decade ago are usually unaware of the extent to which academic criticism has gone in proving that great writers of the past—Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and all other Dead White European Males—may be convicted of racism, sexism, phallocentrism, and imperialism, not to mention any number of other *-isms*, such as "essentialism," the horror of which is comprehensible only to avatars of the latest theories. To save a writer from such condemnation, one needs to show that he or she was on the right side of history—or that the writer described the world as an American literature professor of 1990 would. So generations of Soviet schoolchildren were taught to evaluate classics in terms of their adherence to the current party line. In one of Solzhenitsyn's novels, a character wonders why she is assigned to read Turgenev and Tolstoy since they made ideological mistakes that in her time any fifth grader could identify; and I often wonder how many of our students have the same reaction to those remaining courses in which Milton and Shakespeare, rather than Laurie Anderson, are studied.

To this kind of historically insensitive thinking, Bakhtin replies: "Everything that belongs only to the present dies along with the present." Or, to put the point differently, this approach to history overlooks the fact that ours is not the only present moment, but that each

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past moment was experienced as present when it occurred. It felt open, and it was open—which is to say, our situation was not the only one that could have developed. And it offered the same dubious temptation to regard current judgments as the wisest possible.

Those who succumb to this temptation also overlook the fact that our judgments will appear as naive in future decades as those of 1950 and 1960 appear today. In *War and Peace,* Tolstoy remarks, with the anti-intelligentsial irony at which he excelled, that "there is no one in present-day Russian literature, from schoolboy essayist to learned historian, who does not cast his little stone at [Tsar] Alexander for the things he did wrong at this period of his reign." But all that this means is that Alexander "did not have the same conception of the welfare of humanity as a present-day history professor," who will, in turn, find himself declared reactionary by his successors. Wise people recognize that, even though they cannot predict the ways the views of their own time will become outdated, datedness is nevertheless always in the making. The present—whichever present—enjoys no exemption from superannuation.

Tolstoy and Bakhtin suggest that those incapable of such recognition in effect treat the present moment as essentially apocalyptic. For they implicitly presume the sort of knowledge that could be available only at the end of history, when no future experience could outdate present values. They consequently speak with the degree of absolute certainty that only a final Revelation could warrant. Shakespeare and Alexander saw as through a glass darkly, but we see face to face.

But to disrespect the past is therefore to desiccate the future—to deny the potential for surprise. It is also, despite all claims to the contrary, to engage in ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism. I have in mind the current demand that colleges mandate the study of "third world cultures," which in practice means not the Bhagavad-Gita, the *Arabian Nights,* the wisdom of Confucius, or *The Tale of Genji* but the writings of current Marxist, anti-colonialist, or otherwise anti-Western movements. In this way, radically different cultures are lumped together as *opposed to us*, and millennia of diverse cultural achievements that have nothing to do with us are disregarded. Could there be anything less respectful of other cultures than to define them in terms entirely set by American intellectual debates? Although "third world studies"—the choice of this term rather than, let us say, non-Western studies, is already political—may invoke the rhetoric of diversity and "alterity," its concept of otherness is entirely spurious.

Bakhtin insisted on the genuine otherness of other times and cultures because he believed deeply in the special wisdom to be gained from

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studying them. When diverse cultures encounter each other in a spirit of true dialogue, each is enriched, not only in the discovery of unsuspected riches in the other but also in the recognition of unnoticed potentials in itself.

Bakhtin reminds us of the old schoolboy joke: "The ancient Greeks did not know the main thing about themselves, that they were *ancient* Greeks." They could have had no idea that their works and achievements contained potentials that were to be realized in subsequent centuries, much as we cannot tell what potentials of ancient culture would have been realized if modernity had taken a different turn. Like great writers, civilizations and epochs also contain potentials that require a specific alien perspective to activate. Every culture contains "immense semantic possibilities that have remained undisclosed, unrecognized, and un-utilized throughout the historical life of a given culture." Historical, literary, and anthropological scholarship, if they truly respect the otherness of others, can help to liberate cultures from "the captivity of time."

Thus a study of non-Western cultures, and of other periods in our own cultures, requires, first of all, a knowledge of values and artifacts different from our own. It also requires a firm grasp of our own culture, so that the encounter of the two will be a profound and informed one, activating the potentials of each. Only then will that special sort of dialogue Bakhtin calls "creative understanding" be possible.

One must know and love the other not as oneself, but precisely as an other; or, to use Bakhtin's terminology, one must "live into" the foreign culture without losing one's spiritual "outsideness." "Without *one's own* questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign (but, of course, the questions must be serious and sincere). Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and *open* totality, but they are mutually enriched." It is this sort of wealth that the humanities promise at every present moment.

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Back to Batavia

BILL KAUFFMAN

IN JOHN GARDNER'S NOVEL *The Sunlight Dialogues*, a wild man is arrested for painting *LOVE* in the middle of Oak Street in the sleepy western New York hamlet of Batavia. He is jailed; he escapes; he is gunned down. The disturber of the peace is revealed to be Taggert Hodge, a local boy gone loco, a wandering son who returned to clue Batavians in to the mysteries of existence.

Poor Tag: he was a century and a half late.

One hundred fifty years ago my native region of west central New York state blazed with the white fires of reform and fanaticism. Joseph Smith, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, Liberty party abolitionists, and a thousand ragged prophets traveled our "psychic highway," as the folklorist Carl Carmer called the Utica-to-Batavia corridor. We had Anti-Masons and reincarnated Christs and enough necromancers to pester the dead till time's end.

The fires have long since dimmed in our Burned-Over District; the scorched earth eventually grew verdant. Itinerant preachers became vagrants, and emancipationists took up temperance, vegetarianism, and other nuisance causes. Nothing burned here anymore. So when I returned home in 1988, less hirsute than Taggert Hodge but no less feverish, I brought my own tinderbox.

I was going to be a one-man regionalist revival: a resuscitator of a weary sluggish beaten lump of a culture. To raise the dead—to wake the living—to introduce them and watch a flowering of provincial genius the likes of which had never been seen before . . . this was my immodest aim.

Such grand visions clouded my eyes! I saw Grant Wood painting murals for Cedar Rapids businessmen; I saw Sinclair Lewis—an "all-out professional Minnesotan," the artist Adolph Dehn called him—memorizing the Gopher State's eighty-seven counties and county seats, just like Cass Timberlane; I saw Sarah Orne Jewett greeting an awed little Mary Ellen Chase in South Berwick, kindly enjoining the girl to grow up

✪ BILL KAUFFMAN's novel *Every Man a King* (Soho Press/Farrar, Straus & Giroux) was published in 1989.

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and write stories "all about Maine"; I saw Helen Hooven Santmyer being reproved by her M.L.S. superiors at the Dayton Library, but the old gal just smiled, for she was writing *Ohio Town* by kerosene light, and when it was published, Xenia would dwarf its smug neighbor to the west; I saw Hamlin Garland, the barefoot Dakotan, having a man-to-man with William Dean Howells, and for an instant Boston knelt before two great midwesterners; I saw Tom Benton on a Kansas City bar stool, Edward Eggleston upholding the honor of Hoosierhood, and Andrew Lytle walking on water where the TVA flooded his family's plantation. And I saw my own Upstate New York alive, again.

If you have an eagle eye, you can see the faint impress of a literary tradition in my New York. There were Cooper and Paulding and Irving, of course, although the latter two belong to the Hudson Valley, which is too rich for our blood. Harold Frederic wrote some wonderful stories about Yorker ambivalence toward the Civil War, and *The Damnation of Theron Ware,* his novel of a simple Upstate minister's faith-shattering encounter with the Enlightenment, is still read in some American universities. We had a fine local colorist, Philander Deming, and our own cracker-barrel sage, David Harum, a folksy dialectal elidin' banker in *David Harum: A Story of American Life* by Edward Noyes Westcott, a descendant of the Oneida communalists. In the dark years of the American midcentury, our torch was carried by Walter Edmonds, best known for his historical novel *Drums Along the Mohawk*, part of a six-volume chronicle depicting the settling and creeping modernization of central York. Among contemporary writers, John Gardner set *The Resurrection* and *The Sunlight Dialogues* in Batavia; Frederick Exley does his boozy autobiographical thing in his gelid refuge of Watertown; William Kennedy literarily owns Albany, that grafting outpost of empire, which is to Upstate as Guantánamo is to Cuba; Henry Clune wrote well about middle-class Rochester; and Richard Russo is still trying to make peace with Utica.

That mountain in the distance, sometimes ours and sometimes not, is of course Edmund Wilson, Tory anarchist, stout laird of Talcottville, studying the Iroquois, measuring his family tree, yelling at loud kids racing motorbikes on the street where he lived.

Wilson is, to put it gently, problematic for a western New Yorker. In the marvelously cranky *Upstate*, he complained that people west of Syracuse "seemed very low grade. Not even pretty girls, but pale gray-eyed lean ill-built Polish women and the usual thick loutish men. One wonders how these men and women can feel enough mutual attraction even to breed more of their unattractive kind." Et tu, Bunny.

My first novel, *Every Man a King*, was soon to be published, and though it masqueraded as a satirical assault on Washington, D.C.'s

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ideologue class, it contained (horrors!) a message: Go home, young man. Return to Anniston, to Fargo, to Saginaw, to Batavia. Rediscover the permanent things; fight your battles under the parochial flag. Grant Wood wanted Cedar Rapids to be the Athens of Iowa; I'd settle for making my postage stamp of ground no less. I wanted to be the nativest son. So I came home, to Batavia, in Genesee County, where my ancestors settled early, and fought in the Civil War, and farmed on a human scale, and repaired Model T's, and supervised the construction of the Batavia water tower, and ran for City Council as representatives of the German-Irish Democracy, and lost.

Batavia had suffered more than most small cities in the years since the Second World War. Its glory days were in the distant past, in the Jacksonian era, when an itinerant gadfly named William Morgan wrote a book exposing the rituals of Freemasonry. Morgan was kidnapped and (it is presumed) drowned for his perfidy by local Masons. An Anti-Masonic party sprang up overnight; by 1828, Upstate New York was ablaze, and Batavia was capital of the American political fringe for five head-spinning years. (Today, a family friend heads Batavia's Masonic lodge, which is akin to being the Rotary president of Sauk Centre.)

The Gilded Age was good to Batavia. Dean Richmond, president of the New York Central Railroad, lived a grandee's life on Main Street, and the tracks he laid brought industries of all sorts—gun works, a tractor factory—to our town. Richmond was a Copperhead Democrat, but Batavia was solidly Republican, as it has been ever since. A blue-collar enclave of seventeen thousand surrounded by fertile black muck, with its rows of onions and potatoes and corn, Batavia was a friendly little city, like one of Vachel Lindsay's prairie towns, but with more ethnic spice: the English and Scots and Germans were soon joined by the Irish, and at century's dawn there came an influx of Poles and Italians.

But progress came and washed my town away. In the heady morn of the postwar world, Governor Thomas Edmund Dewey (of New York City, as our state governors always are) determined to build his own Erie Canal, and the New York State Thruway was born. Eminent domain came to rural York with a vengeance; hundreds of miles of farmland were stolen by Albany, for the greater good, of course: this state-of-the-art roadway would link us with New York City, four hundred short miles away. Think of the benefits!

The curmudgeons carped and the mossbacks muttered, and the thruway was built. Its first casualty was Route 5, Batavia's Main Street, for years a bustling thoroughfare. Travelers ate at diners along Route 5, and slept in hotels, and shopped at stores—until progress came, and the farms were paved, and Route 5 died. Across Upstate, countless locally owned and owner-operated businesses were bankrupted. Drivers stuck to the thruway and ate at the Howard Johnson's monopoly.

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Batavia responded to the demise of Route 5 with an act of parricide unequaled this side of Rumania, where the demonic Ceausescu once waged war on pre-Communist architecture. The city fathers rushed headlong into urban renewal, whereby the federal government paid Batavia to knock down its past: the mansions of the founders, the sandstone churches, the brick shops, all of it (even Dean Richmond's manor, which had become an orphanage financed by Miss Edna, the city's legendary madam with a heart of gold, may she rest in peace).

Batavia tore out—literally—its five-block heart and filled the cavity with a ghastly mall, a dull gray sprawling oasis in a desert of parking spaces. The mall was a colossal failure, but it succeeded in destroying the last vestiges of our home-run economy. J.C. Penney and Wendy's were in; the Dipson Theater and the Dagwood Restaurant were out. As our chamber of commerce might put it in one of their doggedly goofy brochures, Batavia had entered the global economy.

Why did our town rip out its heart? Two explanations. First, Batavia's civic class has the same lust for progress that Sinclair Lewis deplored in Minnesota. (Anyone who tells you that Red Lewis has dated poorly just doesn't live in a small town. Lewis's novels are as mordant and—forgive me, sir—as relevant as ever.) Vergil Gunch foresaw the urban renewal debacle in *Babbitt*:

> Fact is, we're mighty lucky to be living among a bunch of city-folks, that recognize artistic things and business-punch equally. We'd feel pretty glum if we got stuck in some Main Street burg and tried to wise the old codgers up to the kind of life we're used to here. But, by golly, there's this you got to say for 'em: Every small American town is trying to get population and modern ideals. . . . You don't want to just look at what these small towns are, you want to look at what they're aiming to become, and they all got an ambition that in the long run is going to make 'em the finest spots on earth—they all want to be just like Zenith!

The second reason Batavia obliterated the handiwork of her fathers has to do with class and ethnic resentments, which we are not allowed to talk about in America under penalty of banishment. (Fortunately, my wife coaches high school tennis in the Village of Elba, five miles north of Batavia, so our exile is within walking distance.) Batavia's immigrants, particularly the Italians and Catholics, prospered in the middle years of our century. They surpassed the natives—including the booboisie, which had barred them from country clubs and the like—and they came to feel, understandably, that Batavia needed a face-lift to reflect its reconfigured ethnic mix. New, sometimes gaudy, homes were built on the city's east end; the old, dilapidated Victorian houses and Greek revival mansions of downtown were considered eyesores, paint-peeling

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relics of pre–Ellis Island days. An elderly member of the displaced gentry recently observed, "It was just a hatred of the people who built Batavia." (Plea for immunity: I am a church-going Catholic—St. Joseph's Parish—blessed with a beautiful and proudly Italian grandmother. I assume this pedigree shields me from the dread brand "nativist." No scarlet letters for me, thank you.)

In any event, the center of town all came down, and Batavia looked like Dresden. When urban renewal was completed, it looked like Dresden with a grotesque mall sprouting from the rubble. The destruction of old Batavia led to a housing shortage. Our poorest residents had for years lived above the small Main Street shops, in the respectable brick buildings of the late nineteenth century. Progress had kicked them out on the streets. So Batavia, prodded by her concerned clergy and laity, secured federal monies to construct three typically ugly and depressing clusters of low-income housing. Alas, we hadn't enough poor people to fill these jerry-built tenements. So black families from Buffalo were shipped in, and Batavia had its first real taste of race hatred. Theretofore, a small black community had existed in Genesee County; the Underground Railroad ran parallel to the New York Central up here, and some of our black citizens have roots in Batavia a century or more deep. Relations between the races had been cordial if not close; public housing changed that. The newcomers from Buffalo soon dominated the police blotter; the crimes were for the most part petty, but the animosities were real. "Lotta niggers in Batavia," became a common refrain, and pious exhortations to brotherhood and school celebrations of Martin Luther King Day changed nothing.

John Gardner thought the old town had become emblematic of Main Street USA's decline:

> Batavia, New York, where the Holland Land Office was . . . the beginning of a civilization . . . selling the land in this country. It was, in the beginning, a wonderful, beautiful place with the smartest Indians in America around. Now it's this old, run-down town which has been urban-renewalized just about out of existence. The factories have stopped and the people are poor and sometimes crabby; the elm trees are all dead, and so are the oaks and maples. So it's a good symbol.

Silly me, full of pride and vainglory and the defiant screw-you-Wadsworth spirit of my forefathers, I wanted to pour gasoline in one glorious wide path from Utica to Buffalo. Once ignited, the Burned-Over District would positively glow with fire, a beautiful consuming conflagration, and out of the flames a new Upstate would emerge, dreamy and boisterous and refractory, just like one hundred fifty years ago.

Boy, was I ever stupid.

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I didn't listen to my Los Angeles–bred wife, who likes the landscape but scoffs that my Upstate, with its gallery of *David Harum* horse-sense philosophers and salt-of-the-earth trailer park Joads and stiff-spined Episcopalian ladies creaking with noblesse oblige, is somewhere between a mirage and a lie. I didn't even listen to my own novel, in which the protagonist, who returned to Batavia after being run out of Washington, is forced into the most factitious populism because there is simply no other outlet for honest protest.

Perhaps mine is the commonest tale of the exile returning home. It begins with the longings of Booth Tarkington's *Gentleman from Indiana*: "The thought of coming back to a life-work in my native state appealed to me. I always had a dim sort of feeling that the people out in these parts knew more—had more SENSE and were less artificial."

I had spent several pleasurable years in Babylon—Washington, D.C., and Southern California, to be precise—until the usual pangs of homesickness grew into something quite different: a conviction that only by living in the place of my nativity, and the nativity of my ancestors, could I live a life that was anything but footloose, ephemeral, meaningless. As the writer and my fellow Upstater Frederick Exley says, "Watertown is not in my marrow; it *is* my marrow."

When I take midnight walks I feel the presence of ghosts. I pass an abandoned brick warehouse that Will Garraghan built, or the shut-down factory where Ed Kauffman was shop steward. One block from the family homestead is Dwyer Stadium, home of the Class A Batavia Clippers, who were Bunyanesque heroes to generations of local kids. My dad was batboy, and for a few games I was too. *Field of Dreams* syrup aside, and pardon my blasphemy, but my every visit to Dwyer is an act of communion.

Coming home exerts appeal especially to the contrarians among us. Every economic, cultural, and social pressure pushes us into the cities, the bigger the better. Returning becomes an act of rebellion. But just as no one sings louder than the whore in church, no regional patriotism can match that of the returning prodigal. Through travel he has discovered what is unique about his home place; he insists on shouting these newly found truths from the rooftops—and boring his neighbors blue.

Southerners know this better than anyone. Proving Lord Acton's aphorism that exile is the nursery of nationalism, almost every one of the agrarian authors of the 1930 Old South manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* spent his early adulthood north of Mason-Dixon; Stark Young and Robert Penn Warren, among others, never returned. But they *did* look back, and that made all the difference. They had to see the city to love the country.

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Alas, localism is neater in theory than in practice. I visited the mall on my first day home, to draw the bead on my enemy. To my surprise, I could summon none of the old bile; all I felt was pity. No one was ever there; the shops were nigh deserted, fudgsicle-smeared urchins crowded around video games, fat women and vaguely remembered white-trash classmates slumped on the L-shaped orange couches in the atrium.

Just inside the western entrance, a mural spanned the wall. High school students had painted—from pictures, in the way that I only know my great-great-grandparents from daguerreotypes—what Main Street used to look like. Chuck's Sporting Goods, Scott & Bean, Charles Men's Shop: the colors were vivid, the effect somber. This was our town, before we tore it down. It's as if an unrepentant murderer was showing off his prize possession, a Polaroid of his hapless victim.

Everywhere in Batavia I found small independent businesses in retreat. The Tops grocery chain has opened a super store on West Main, and all those little corner grocers, where at three o'clock the kids, liberated from school, bought pretzel sticks and Bazooka Joes and Red Hot Dollars, all those Lamberts and Wandryks and Says and Borrellis are gone, gone, gone. Mr. Quartley just died, and the Plattens are hanging on, barely. And now Tops has a pizza oven, and a Domino's just opened in the K Mart Plaza, so Pontillo's and Arena's and Ficarella's and Starvin' Marvin, you'd better dig in and fight. Or maybe it would just be easier to sell out, pack the wife and kids into a U-Haul, and slink down to Florida—to a trailer-park reservation with all the other white Indians.

Even Dwyer Stadium is endangered. An electronic scoreboard ushered in a new regime; no longer do kids scurry to the center-field wall between innings to hang metallic hits, runs, and errors shingles. (A boy's life knew no greater thrill.) If the governor dishes out the pork, plastic seats will replace our vintage 1930s grandstand. And the Clippers' parent team, the Philadelphia Phillies, has complained that our right-center-field wall is too short (lefties salivate at a 360-foot power alley), so, like lap dogs, management has agreed to reshape the diamond to boring Phillies' dimensions. By 1992, our coliseum will be standardized, conventionalized, Zenithized.

The daily newspaper has passed from the Griswolds and the McWains—fine old Republicans, how gentle that Main Street Harding hauteur seems now—to a chain. The chain sent a team of journalism school, degreed outsiders to Batavia, where they patiently instruct us in contemporary etiquette. (Let's get some foreign titles in the video store! What Batavia needs is a nice Mexican restaurant!) The editorial writers are all looking to move up and out, so the paper's leaders feature plenty of "Outlaw Pit Bulls" and "Dwarf-Tossing a National Disgrace" and "A Plan for World Peace" and nary a "Save County Courthouse."

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When speaking of our endangered county courthouse, I remember that one of my fictive models was the title character in Berry Fleming's charming 1943 novel *Colonel Effingham's Raid.* The Colonel, returning to his sleepy Georgia hometown after a long absence, is aghast to find its venerable courthouse on the verge of destruction. Swelling with outraged patriotism, he sounds the tocsin, calling all good men and women to the ramparts . . . and no one listens, save the Daughters of the Confederacy.

Colonel Effingham had his raiders, and Batavia has hers. They are elderly, mostly women. Their companions live on old streets and in cemeteries. They are Friends of the Library and members of the Holland Purchase Historical Society. They remember what Batavia used to be; they are saddened by its decline, which they cannot prevent, because the town is no longer theirs.

It belongs to the Johnson Newspapers Corporation, King Communications of Boston, Tops, J.C. Penney, K Mart, Genesee Community College (run by "credentialed" outsiders) and the government of New York State and Uncle Sam. We have been crushed, not by the iron heel but by a soft noiseless Thom McCann sole.

I do not want to paint too relentlessly depressing a picture. Hundreds still gather for Friday night high school football, and they cheer as loudly as ever; dozens attend the barbershop-quartet concerts in the Blind School Park; a hardy band of volunteers mows the lawn of our pioneer cemetery. Yet so many more Batavians are huddled around the living-room TV, watching "Entertainment Tonight" or some vapid sitcom, as localism withers on its ancient vine.

All over Upstate, people are pledging allegiance to national culture. They are Americans, not Upstaters, and if you believe, as I do, that homogeneity is death, then this loss of particularistic, parochial patriotism is a horrible thing. The provinces are aping the capital—as though we really need the Jay McInerny of Glens Falls, the Tama Janowitz of Johnson City, the Andy Warhol of Watertown.

Our best rock band, Jamestown's 10,000 Maniacs, is better known in Los Angeles than in Batavia. (Pity, as lead Maniac Natalie Merchant is a Burned-Over Chautaqua County spiritualist, a Lily Dale sprite.) Central New York boasts that it gave actor Richard Gere to the world, but Walter Edmonds, the author of *Drums Along the Mohawk,* wiles away the days in Concord, Massachusetts, near the Sleepy Hollow cemetery but far from the Mohawk. Mormons from around the world visit the Hill Cumorah in Palmyra, but days pass without a single visitor at some local historical sites. Thanks to New York City–dominated Regents, our high school graduates are more familiar with Alice Walker than with James Fenimore Cooper.

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The question I faced, and failed utterly to answer, was this: How does one *begin* to revive a regional culture long dormant? I used to think it was funny when populists rode into town alone and went out the same way, disgusted that the townsfolk hadn't the gumption to take up arms. But no more.

The agrarian John Gould Fletcher, returned from a quarter century in England, once shared the dream and the disappointment.

> I saw no reason, in that spring of 1933, why Arkansas should not achieve a genuine culture of its own, as significant in the pattern of American living as the culture of New England or of New York had been. My hope, however, of the achievement of any very vital and original culture for my native state has now largely waned. . . . The lack of support, moral and financial, for genuine expression of local and indigenous culture is one of the most flagrantly vicious facts in American life today. How many American authors, artists, intellectuals have made reputations, only by getting away from their own native backgrounds, and by successfully ignoring the small-town disposition to criticize?

There is an earnestness bordering on the pathetic in those writers who have gone home again. Sinclair Lewis learned his counties but just couldn't stay in any one of them for very long. Jack Kerouac held court at his brother-in-law Nicky's bar in Lowell, Massachusetts; a drunken bum, said his neighbors, just another high school jock gone to pot. Helen Hooven Santmyer published two failed novels and returned to Xenia, Ohio, to teach English. She lived the life of a bourgeois spinster and wrote a fat best-seller, . . . *And Ladies of the Club*, and a loving history of Xenia, *Ohio Town*, but I wonder: did Xenia treat her well? Flannery O'Connor had no choice; lupus chased her back to Milledgeville, Georgia. Even the sainted O'Connor gave in to fitful bitterness. She wrote to an admirer, Benjamin Griffith, "Since you show an interest in my book I presume you are a foreigner, as nobody in Georgia shows much interest. Southern people don't know anything about the literature of the South unless they have gone to Northern colleges or to some of the conscious places like Vanderbilt or Sewanee or W & L."

How I wish we had a Vanderbilt, a Sewanee, a W & L. Young Southern writers, no matter how remote their parish, how indifferent their neighbors, have a thousand polestars of every conceivable magnitude and color to guide them. The Southern sky is full of William Gilmore Simms and James Branch Cabell and Carson McCullers and Eudora Welty and even glittering Truman Capote, and look, there's the Thomas Wolfe nebula, huge and diffuse.

Upstate, the firmament is dark. There are footprints in the snow, but they are unillumined, hard to follow, and most just tail off after a while. The territory is uncharted; trailblazers are bound to get lost in the woods,

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and few ever emerge. You can preach and scream all you like, but certain facts are irrefragable: Batavia is now owned and operated by distant corporations. We are governed by Washington and Albany (in practice, New York City). We read newspapers written by corporate outsiders, watch television shows produced by people who despise us, hold jobs on the sufferance of business-school-trained executives who wouldn't be caught dead in the best of our restaurants. (Our nouvellest dish is spaghetti, and *Les Miz* ain't ever gonna grace the stage of the high school auditorium.)

At the end of my second year in Batavia, the Catholic hospital in which I was born sought to purchase one of the last mansions on Main Street—built in 1811—and knock it down. In its stead would stand a high-rise residence for affluent elderly people. An architect from St. Louis was hired to supervise the razing and subsequent rising.

The preservationist remnant took its case to the planning board, and lost. Votes to save the mansion were cast by Catherine Roth—a woman of aristocratic demeanor, stern and indefatigable, faithful to the old Batavia—and Hollis Upson, a rooted son. The three votes for demolition were cast by Italian-surnamed commissioners. Is that ethnic division significant? Am I bigoted to notice? (A self-hater, as I am an Italian quadroon?)

The matter then went to the City Council, the court of last resort. Preservationists packed Council chambers. (Located in the 1853 red brick manse of George Brisbane, son of our first merchant, City Hall, too, will one day be reduced to rubble.) The *Daily News* set the tone in its pre-meeting editorial: the "Fisher home must go," it lectured, because the hospital is "leading the rush into the future." Hospital officials derided opponents as "history buffs": a devastating putdown in fin de siècle America. The Council enthusiastically approved destruction; we rush into the future, unimpeded by the past.

St. Louis, Washington, Philadelphia, Albany, New York City: we entrust our lives and landmarks and cultural judgments to distant experts from famous cities. When did we lose confidence in ourselves? When did small-town America forfeit home rule? No one took it from us—we lost it. Sophisticates and city slickers are not our biggest problem: Batavians have met the enemy, and he is us.

Sometime in the fast-receding past, we renounced the old republic and turned a continent full of Okies and Yorkers and Hoosiers and Utah jack Mormons and Duluth boosters and Brooklynites and Maine Yankees into *Americans* whose passions are now spent on things distant: Donald Trump, the drug war, missing children, Jesse Jackson, global interdependence, Tom Cruise, Paula Abdul, and others, ad nauseum. Sinclair

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Lewis saw it coming, but even Zenith had its own poetaster, Chum Frink. (Chum is probably poet-in-residence at Cal State Wherever these days.)

Batavia's expiry may not impoverish the national letters. But what if my town is not atypical? Can regional literature survive the death of a thousand Batavias? When Anti-Masons and the Dagwood Restaurant and Edna's whorehouse give way to McDonald's and Burger King and MTV, do we condemn ourselves to a place-less fiction in which one burg is the same as the next? Are the ethnic enclaves within big cities the last fertile ground for parochial culture?

American regionalists face a daunting task. The giant we seek to wake may, after all, be dead. But one thing we must believe: John Gardner's Taggert Hodge was right. *Love* is the answer. Scrawl it across a highway near you.

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The First Signs of Spring

JAMES LANGLAS

The house has finally stopped falling in upon itself,
and the corners of the bedrooms have softened.
You do not bump into things in your hurry
to find daylight, in your search for the stairs.
It is a time of doors opening smoothly,
into the hallway, from one room to the next.
The drain in the bathtub is clear again,
and all running water has a destination.

The tile feels good to your bare feet,
and your ankles do not crack
as you enter the shower.
You begin to notice the length
and coarseness of your hair, the curls
behind your ears. You remember why
you are fascinated by the colors of things:
the soap on the mirror, the lime on the walls, skin.

No one knows why it all comes down to this,
why we always seem to look somewhere else.
We make some easy comment about fresh smells
drifting in through the screens
or the different shades of green out back
when it's really just time to figure out
what we've been missing and then get up
and make something of ourselves.

✪ JAMES LANGLAS's poems have appeared in *Poetry, Spoon River Quarterly,* and *Swamproot.*

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TEACHING

Arnaldo Momigliano

A Pupil's Notes

ANTHONY GRAFTON

In a hot July of 1973 I arrived in London ready to begin work on a doctoral dissertation about Joseph Scaliger, a famous and terrifyingly learned classical scholar of the French Renaissance. I had been trained at the University of Chicago in Renaissance intellectual history, classics, and the history of science. I had read secondary literature in English, French, Italian, and German. And I knew precisely the coordinates that Scaliger occupied on my mental map of Renaissance culture. His work on the history of classical texts and calendars formed part of the "historical revolution" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It reflected, that is, the development of a wider historical consciousness and the effort to frame precise critical rules for evaluating sources that preoccupied better-known intellectuals of his time and place, like Louis Le Roy and Jean Bodin. My task, I thought, was to draw from Scaliger's work a more technical and detailed account of this revolution than previous scholars had constructed from Bodin and company.

Powered by these notions, not loaded down by learning, and kept afloat by a welcome but exiguous Fulbright Fellowship, I steered my fragile craft into what my teachers at Chicago and the Fulbright authorities agreed was the only appropriate harbor: the long, dark, narrow office, crammed with apparently unrelated books *de omni re scibili et quibusdam aliis*, of Arnaldo Momigliano, then in his last years as professor of ancient history in the University of London at University College.

Momigliano was already a prominent figure on another of my imaginary maps, that of contemporary European learning. His *Studies in Historiography* had attained canonical status in American universities in the manner normal in the 1960s: that is, they had been published by Harper in the series of paperback Torchbooks from which my generation received so much of its education in European thought. His *Contributi alla storia degli studi classici (Contributions to the History of Classical Studies)*, the vast collection of his articles from which the *Studies* were selected, had already begun to make a formidable array on library shelves. And he himself had long been a familiar, if not a reassuring, figure on the campus of the University of Chicago. A small, intense man dressed in many layers of dark wool, he gave public lectures of stern austerity and occasional biting wit. I had heard him speak, not long before I left for England, on freedom of speech in the ancient world. The experience provoked awe, but the lecture itself, with its roll call of great scholars, ancient and modern, many of whom were not even names to me, was as inaccessible as Momigliano himself appeared.

The man I had admired from a great distance was a very complex figure. He was the product of a long and complex series of experiences unfathomable to a young American of our time, experiences that included his extraordinary upbringing in the learned Jewish bourgeoisie of Turin, his exile, his hard-won mastery of a foreign language and culture. I knew little about his life and could have understood none of it at the time, and I will

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not attempt to discuss it now, since others infinitely more competent than I have already done so. Instead, I will do what—as Momigliano taught me—it is always worthwhile for a historian to do when faced with a phenomenon too complex to explain. I will remember what he meant to me, as a teacher.

When I was notified that I had received my Fulbright and been assigned Momigliano as my supervisor, I sent him a summary of what I planned to do and a list of secondary sources I had read. His reply—the first of many punctiliously rapid, roughly typed replies, on blue air letters, to come my way over the years—was detailed but not encouraging. One subject I had planned to cover was the textual criticism of the great French scholars of Greek of Scaliger's Parisian youth around 1560, Jean Dorat and Denis Lambin, whose lectures he had attended at the Collège Royal, the ancestor of the Collège de France. This Momigliano told me to forget; another scholar was already at work "and you could hardly compete with her." One book I had read with profit and admiration was a survey of Italian antiquarian scholarship in the Renaissance by another Italian émigré professor at London, a man of enormous and deserved fame in Renaissance scholarship. This he told me to ignore; it offered only "an outsider's first look at an unknown thing." He unbent far enough to tell me to read Sebastiano Timpanaro, the great Florentine independent scholar whose *La Genesi del metodo del Lachmann* of 1963 remains the most insightful of all studies of the history of textual criticism in modern times. Otherwise Momigliano expressed only a general interest in me and my work.

Once in London, I thought it might be wise to ask for more detailed advice, dusty though the first answer had seemed. Being an American, I turned up without an appointment, only to become quite lost in the dark labyrinth of alleys, corridors, dank huts, and grand old buildings that makes up University College London. After wandering for some time, I found Momigliano at work, somewhere above his beloved "auto-icon" of Jeremy Bentham—the skeleton of Bentham, topped with a wax effigy of his head, that greets visitors to the college's main hall. He was about to leave for his customary summer in Italy when I came knocking at his door, but he found time for an hour's impromptu conversation in which he gave me many more surprises than his letter had.

Momigliano asked if I had read much of the scholarly work of Angelo Poliziano. I knew the name—a small point in my favor. Poliziano was familiar to me as a brilliant Latin and Italian poet, a client of Lorenzo de' Medici and a friend of Pico della Mirandola. But it had never occurred to me that a study of such a modern figure as Scaliger, a sixteenth-century Frenchman who wound up his career at the innovative university of Leiden in republican, Calvinist, mercantile Holland, should begin from or stop at the equivocal Florence of the Medici and the Platonic Academy—a world of courtly elegance and ritual magic that inspired more discomfort than interest in most American historians. Fortunately, ignorance never surprised Momigliano, and he had a partial remedy at hand. He advised me to begin with Poliziano. He also told me that I could do so easily around the corner from his office, in the library of the Warburg Institute.

With most of July still to come, I entered that austere modernist building, obtained a reader's card, and found shelves burdened with Poliziano's Latin works and modern Italian studies of them. Within a few days it became clear to me—as Momigliano had intended—that Poliziano's work had marked a watershed in the history of classical scholarship: a break between an older, rhetorical style of humanism and a newer, technical philology. The summer passed in a blur of sixteenth- and twentieth-century typefaces. It soon emerged that, if Scaliger's wide historical interests were shaped by his original French milieu, in the technical details of his work he responded not only to the historians and philologists of his own time and place but even more to the precedents Poliziano had offered and to later French and Italian adaptations of these. The larger point of Momigliano's first suggestion was also clear. One must study not a single individual who had been identified as important by the modern academic culture that one came from, or a single supposedly "revolutionary" generation of scholars, but the whole scholarly tradition that Scaliger himself had belonged to. This tradition began in the fifteenth century, though its most distant roots ran all the way back to antiquity, and it survived in the European scholarship of the day, or at least in that of the very few scholars Momigliano seemed to take seriously—a tiny set that included such celebrities as his London colleague

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Carlo Dionisotti, his Florentine friend Timpanaro, and his Oxford friend and former student Peter Brown—and that excluded many scholarly household names. Only an approach that set Scaliger firmly into this long-term context could possibly do him justice.

The College of the University of Chicago had given me as broad an education as any American university could in the 1960s. It had required me to study the history of Western civilization in one breathtaking three-quarter-long survey course that resembled nothing quite so much as being drowned. Everything that had ever happened in the West passed before my eyes (taking the entire course in one summer, in an accelerated version, as I did, accentuated the side effects). It had forced me to learn New Critical techniques of close reading in the humanities and to understand the ideal types of classical German social thought. It had even required me to read Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* three times—never, of course, in a course about America. At the same time, however, the university had permitted and even encouraged specialization. It had allowed me to continue studying Latin and Greek, and other languages as well, while becoming a historian. And my teachers had happily encouraged me to begin primary research in the Latin sources of Renaissance high culture. Graduate school had come not as a radical shock but as a natural continuation of undergraduate work.

For all that, meeting Momigliano was like nothing I had ever expected or imagined. As a teacher, to be sure, he shared many qualities with members of the Chicago faculty—and his possession of an *anima naturaliter Midwayensis* no doubt helps to explain his great influence at Chicago in the decade after his retirement from London. Most Fulbright supervisors welcomed their pupils cordially, gave them a cup of tea, and then dropped them for what remained of their time in London or Oxford into that black hole that all graduate students in England inhabited in those almost seminar-less days. By contrast Momigliano, very much like an American teacher, assumed that his students would keep regularly in touch, informing him about the problems of their research and even the vagaries of their lives. He wanted to meet every week or two, usually for lunch or tea in one of the spectacularly squalid cafeterias maintained by University College or in the University of London's towering gray Senate House (by legend the origin of Orwell's Ministry of Fear). "Take what you like," he would say with a sweeping gesture, as I arrived—late for an American appetite—at a lunch counter offering nothing edible but bananas and yogurt. Then he would ask—as eagerly as any American supervisor—how my research was going, whether anything interesting had turned up in the bookshops, whether I had seen some particularly foolish article or review by *X* or *Y*. Only after a year of comparing notes with other American and English graduate students in London did I realize how unusual this close interest in one's progress really was.

The apparent familiarity of this close and meticulous tutorial supervision concealed—as soon became apparent—a set of intellectual and pedagogical assumptions far outside an American's ken, and hardly likely to make an American student feel competent or comfortable. Even the best American teachers saw themselves as masters of a specific craft. They treated their apprentices well, honing their skills and introducing them to masters from other universities who could offer special insights or further information on a given topic. They might well cross disciplinary lines within a given period—as my own excellent supervisor, Eric Cochrane, did when he wrote as cogently about the art and architecture of late Renaissance Florence as he did about its politics and historiography. But chronological boundaries were insuperable. The rules of the guild confined most scholars to the narrow comfort of one discipline and virtually all of them to one period and place.

Momigliano, by contrast, resembled those artists of the early Italian Renaissance who refused to pay guild dues in order to show that they were men of learning and culture rather than practitioners of one trade. As one attended his seminar, came to tea at his invitation with visitors, or simply ran into him in the halls of University College, between the fresco of Bentham founding the College and the "auto-icon," one met scholars old and young, ancient, medieval, and modern, Eastern and Western. Momigliano always seemed to know these people, and their teachers, intimately. He had always followed the development of their work and set it against a rich background of earlier scholarship; and he had

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always fashioned an evaluation of their efforts as sharp and permanent as an ancient epitaph. In the course of a year's attendance at his Warburg Institute seminar, I heard a distinguished Sinologist discuss the historiography of his field, comparing Jacques Gernet with Marcel Granet and Granet with Max Weber; an even more distinguished French historian of the ancient world dissecting the world of myth into the raw and the cooked; Jonathan Miller eloquently analyzing Mesmerism; and Momigliano himself lavishing his erudition on a rich account of how the great Greek historian of Rome, Polybius, had returned to the West in the Renaissance. Seminar after seminar, Momigliano arrived with a vast pile of letters and book mailers bearing a collector's envy of stamps from around the world. These he would open and examine, often shaking his head and murmuring, while the speaker read. During the latter part of most talks he appeared to sleep. Yet in the discussion that followed, usually low-keyed, hostile, and desultory by the custom of the country, Momigliano's questions always showed mastery of the field discussed, and he gave the speaker firm instructions about the directions his research and analysis should have followed.

This spectacle was at first discouraging. Momigliano himself quoted, in his spectacular lecture on Polybius, the poem by which an eighteenth-century scholar had expressed his disappointment when he learned that what he took to be new books of Polybius in Latin translation were really the work of the humanist Leonardo Bruni. He thanked the scholar who told him this "for making me melancholy for a whole year." The lecture covered a millennium and a half of textual history in an hour, showed an intimate knowledge of more humanists than I had ever hoped to know a little about, and dispatched in minutes a problem on which I and others had labored for hours in a graduate seminar at Chicago—namely, the mystery of how Machiavelli had read Polybius, not yet available in Latin in his time, while composing his *Discourses on Livy*. I left thinking that I knew how my poor eighteenth-century counterpart felt.

Over the course of my year's work, moreover, Momigliano's standards became starkly —even frighteningly—clear. He did not expect anyone to share his technical command of what seemed to be all works of history ever written, from the official histories of Confucian China to the *Metahistory* of Hayden White (on the whole, he preferred the former). He did not expect anyone to match the depth of his command of the Western classical tradition, text by text (though I and others have profited by his wise instruction—as usual, drawn from some earlier great figure in classical scholarship—to read Plutarch on trains). And he saw most current work in his own special field, the history of historical writing, rather as his beloved Gibbon saw history itself: as a record of the crimes and follies of mankind. His usual response to new books in the field was to discourage others from making such attempts before they had done at least a lifetime of research. In some respects, then, his universal curiosity seemed almost masochistic: a constant search for more evidence that his colleagues were inept and his pupils were dunces (stating the latter point, as he characteristically observed apropos of the great Renaissance historian Justus Lipsius, was "a minor pleasure no teacher will ever deny himself"). At tea in the Warburg before his seminar, the words of condemnation fell far more often than the words of praise, especially the dread "Poor man"—a simple phrase solemnly pronounced in Momigliano's unique Anglo-Piedmontese accent, which carried a weight something like that of "Carthago delenda est." Even the papers of those he invited sometimes provoked him to his most savage word of condemnation, pronounced with a heavy emphasis on the first syllable: "Interesting"—which seemed to refer as much to the general stupidity that produced and tolerated such work as to the case in point. A graduate student working on a problem in the history of scholarship could hardly feel at ease in the presence of a man who repeatedly warned "the ordinary run of graduate students" to stay away from the whole subject.

Yet he became warmer and warmer as the year went on. Perhaps this was partly the result of chance. Nineteen seventy-three was the fall of the Yom Kippur War. Just as the first term began at University College, the news from the Middle East seemed worse and worse. The English newspapers and the BBC, in the tone and often in the substance of their coverage, clearly sided with the Arabs against Israel. These attitudes shocked one who had grown up in the pro-Israeli climate of Amer-

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ica, where the Six-Day War of 1967 had seemed a triumph for the West. Momigliano, of course, they did not surprise. But he had lost his parents in the Holocaust and had himself become an exile; he had many friends in Israel and cherished a deep, if complex, relation to the secular tradition of Jewish scholarship. He suffered visibly as the days drew on and the Israelis underwent their first, temporary defeats. We would meet in college and whisper about the war, conscious for all the distance between us of a common Jewish state of alienation from the ambient society. In those first heartfelt conversations a warmth sprang up that never failed thereafter.

Academic events confirmed and deepened these unacademic exchanges. As I submitted work and received reactions, as I watched Momigliano at work in the seminar, as I munched and listened, it became clear that his ferocious manner imperfectly concealed a deep kindness and willingness to help. He expected me to work, that went without saying; to explore great libraries in England and the Continent and find things he did not know about. He also expected me to think, to devise something resembling a fresh idea rather than to fit another text to ideas already bandied about in the "secondary literature." And he hoped I might show some openness to fields and methods outside my own. When I turned up to the more out-of-the-way of his seminars, those on non-Western subjects, for example, he greeted me with a sunny warmth that quite dispelled the dank shadows of the London winter, simply because I was not as blinkered as those among whom his exile had set him: the professional ancient historians. He saw that Americans and historians of ideas—and certainly American historians of ideas—knew far less about anything than the picked young English classicists whom one sometimes found at tea with him, with their years of training in Greek verse composition and their line-by-line grasp of Thucydides, textual apparatus as well as text. But he also knew that Americans and historians might just have an idea or turn up a fact that interested him. No one who talked—as some of the English young exhaustingly did—of the superiority of good hard evidence, like Athenian tribute lists over mere texts, like Herodotus or Thucydides, would ever win his interest. Sometimes he reminded me of General Galliéni smiling as he saw the taxis lined up to take soldiers to the Marne. He could find charm in anything as long as it was not completely banal.

Even one's mistakes, offered up with innocent pride, might be curious enough to stimulate Momigliano's approval. Once I found, in a bookshop in Lewes that has long since ceased to carry such items, a copy of a diary of boating at early nineteenth-century Eton, written by a schoolboy in the Greek of Thucydides. I brought it into college and asked him if this was not the last work of history written in classical Greek. After a moment's thought, he replied that it wasn't; I had forgotten the great student of pottery, Beazley, who had described his visit to the zoo in the style of Herodotus. But he clearly thought the question amusing even if my evidence had been, as usual, incomplete. He spoke for some time about other examples of Hellenism after Hellenism, from the Byzantine historian Laonicus Chalcondyles to the Greek philosophe Koraës. Momigliano became more and more committed to me and my work as I eventually found, in London and Cambridge, Leiden and Oxford, books and manuscripts that revealed new facets of Scaliger's thought or the reactions of his contemporaries to it.

Momigliano's positive teaching, finally, was generous, thoughtful, and creative. He did not, as an American teacher would, try to improve my style: "That," he once rightly told me, "is an area in which you cannot rival John Clive." Nor did he offer detailed instructions for research after his first suggestion about Poliziano. But he found me other advisors for specific matters, suiting pupil to tutor with a dexterity and insight that revealed how closely he observed people as well as books. He identified the novel elements in what I had found; and he also detected the weak points in my arguments, and gave short, sharp directions, unmitigated by any notion that one might feel some tenderness for a wrong idea of one's own, for their emendation. He was always ready—and almost always able—to help solve any particular technical problem that might have come up. His memory, which had been eidetic when he was young and was still powerful in his later middle age, continually retrieved just when one needed it the most astonishingly remote—and astonishingly relevant—of references. (Asked about Scaliger's relation to the lawyer Cujas, a question for a Renaissance scholar, not an ancient historian, he did not even hesitate before reply-

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ing that I would find help in an article by Volterra published in 1928. "Of course," he continued, "I haven't read it since it appeared; but I think I'm right." He was.) For all his concentration on larger issues, he was the last adviser to think or suggest that details did not matter. They did—enormously.

Above all, once he had decided that I did sometimes find out new things about important issues, he treated me not as a student but as a junior colleague. He would ask my opinion about his own work. (I once read two offprints on the Dan Ryan freeway, while traveling into Chicago with him from O'Hare, where he had given them to me, and praised one. "What was wrong with the other?" he asked without skipping a beat, in a classic vein of Jewish humor more usually applied to cooking.) He would find journals and editors to publish you at a time when American supervisors still saw you as *in statu pupillari*, unready to spread your wings in print—and when editors were far more conservative than they are now. His mordant criticisms of draft papers expressed a deep and abiding generosity of spirit.

My time as Momigliano's pupil ended early—sooner than I or he had wished. In the midst of my first year of dissertation research, I was offered a teaching post in history at Cornell University. This was 1974, the middle of the academic Great Depression of the seventies that did in my generation of scholars in the humanities. Seeing friends at least as able as myself driving cabs, programming computers, or—at best—surviving marginally on fellowship after fellowship, I took the job with enthusiasm, even though I knew my formation was incomplete and my Chicago fellowship had a much-needed year to run. Only then did I learn that Momigliano had to retire, much against his will, from his professorship at London. He had at once rejected the thought of giving up teaching and had accepted a temporary chair at, of all places, Chicago. He would occupy it, in different guises, for the rest of his life. I could have learned far more from him had I returned, as we both expected, to Hyde Park. Instead—as he told me in an apt Greek quotation—I must bravely set out for Ithaca, bearing with me too little learning (but also a prized and now-worn copy of the *Quarto contributo*, inscribed "Souvenir of an English year. AM. Aug. 1974.")

Still, I remained Momigliano's pupil at a distance. I returned as often as I could to Hyde Park and continued, when on leave in London, to attend his seminars at the Warburg Institute and at All Souls in Oxford. He continued to make my mailbox an inlet of that Mississippi of offprints and books by which he kept in contact with friends, pupils, and enemies in many countries. And he continued to offer advice, to discuss historians ancient and modern, and to give inspiring—and depressing—displays of his learning. Our meetings took place in many venues, from the Quadrangle Club at the University of Chicago to the London Underground. But most of them seemed to be in cafeterias and at lunch counters from New York to Oxford, as chance brought us together in the academic small world that the returning prosperity of the late seventies and eighties created—a small world in which Momigliano, invited to deliver every series of named lectures in the Western world, sometimes seemed as omnipresent as he did omniscient.

It was a particular pleasure, in these later years, to watch Momigliano teach in Chicago. His lectures, now freed from the constraints imposed by a professorship of ancient history, could deal with all the topics of his research, ancient, early modern, and modern. His audience, no longer limited to somewhat baffled London undergraduates, included graduate students and professors in many fields who could follow his allusive style, benefit from his vast learning, and sometimes raise questions or provide material that he found stimulating. Even his manner at the podium became a little less formal, as his rapport with his Chicago audiences strengthened.

Yet even in Chicago Momigliano taught most and best in informal situations: in the Regenstein Library, which he loved; over coffee, in the hideous cafeteria with its wallpaper pictures of parading drum majorettes; above all, perhaps, amid the endless treasures of Hyde Park's bookshops, where Momigliano chastened and encouraged generations of the young. They came to him almost by instinct, or so it seemed, oblivious of his European fame but somehow aware of his vast stores of knowledge and the generous openness to the ideas of the young that his fleeting smile so often betrayed. They sat with him at cafeteria tables and stood with him in front of new-book shelves. They took advantage of the free

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time that he possessed in far larger measure in Chicago than he did in London or Oxford, where old friends and new editors, interviewers and correspondents besieged him. And they talked and listened, endlessly. He guided their reading as he had once guided mine, pulling his famous slips of paper and carbon paper from his pockets or relying on what remained an extraordinary memory.

More important—as Momigliano himself explained to me—he told them what projects were too large, too demanding, or too technical for them. He helped many students—modern historians as well as ancient, German historians as well as Greek—whose formal advisers gave them far less help in defining their research. He also found them editors and journals, audiences and jobs. Several students whom I met elsewhere went to Chicago, partly at my suggestion, to work with him. I doubt I have ever done as much good for those who came to Princeton to work with me as I did for those who followed my advice and traveled west. He became my pupils' best teacher.

Some of the debts I owe to Momigliano are shared, of course, with scholars across the world: for the intrepid example of his scholarship, which crossed the bounds of time and space with such ease and power; for the lasting results of his work, which reshaped our understanding of the Western tradition in historiography; for the spectacular students of ancient history whom he trained. But I owe him one debt more, a highly individual one: one that I felt as strongly when I visited him for the last time, in the sunny hospital room in Chicago where he held court early in the summer when he died, as I had done years before in his dark office in London.

Momigliano taught me what I could and could not do, both what I am and what I am not. I, too, am now a professor at a major university, a small presence on the same conference and lecture circuits that he once dominated. I, too, study a wide range of subjects, at least by my modest American standards—and I am sometimes tempted to think of myself as a scholar of importance and originality, a defender, or at least a representative, of that European tradition which Momigliano exemplified. But the error never persists. For Momigliano bequeathed me not only the inimitable corpus of his work and the precious assistance of his criticism, but also the experience of a scholarship so generous that I could never hope to imitate it. This legacy takes a surprisingly vivid form. Momigliano himself seems to remain near me, to warn me on the dangerous occasions I have described. Then I hear the stern voice say: "You could not compete with her"; "an outsider's first look at an unknown thing"; "Poor man"; "Interesting." I realize again how poorly I grasp—and how little I can ever hope to contribute to—the tradition from which Momigliano came and for which he stood. And I value that renewed memory, that continued confrontation with standards I cannot meet, more than I can say. So long as I hear this voice, I think, I can call myself Momigliano's pupil and him my teacher, despite the flaws in my own scholarship, and feel that in doing so I speak no more than the truth.

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Nirad C. Chaudhuri

At Home in Oxford

DUNCAN FALLOWELL

In 1975 I was walking down the high street of Trivandrum in south India, and I went into one of the many small book-and-paper shops of that bookish town and bought a local edition of Strachey's *Queen Victoria* and a book whose author was unknown to me but which looked interesting, *A Passage to England* by Nirad C. Chaudhuri. What a surprise the second book turned out to be when I read it back at the hut. Written with sympathetic but alien eyes, it was the outcome of a five-week visit—Chaudhuri's first trip ever outside India—in the spring of 1955. The book also conveyed clearly the character of its author: affable, lively, a cultural enthusiast, an intellectual, principled, combative, dogmatic, with a streak of fastidious eccentricity, but always immensely interesting.

A few years later I found a copy of *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) by the same writer in a secondhand bookshop in Salisbury. A few years after that I read it. It is a much bigger, stranger book, the author's first, spaciously written with a politesse that was both easygoing and ceremonious. It was rich in descriptions of Calcutta and the Bengal countryside and provocative interpretations of events. And I recalled the dedication, startling for an Indian:

> To the memory of the British Empire in India which conferred subjecthood on us but withheld citizenship; to which yet every one of us threw out the challenge: "Civis Britannicus Sum" because all that was good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by the same British rule.

✪ DUNCAN FALLOWELL is the author of two novels, *Satyrday* and *The Underbelly*.

Then in 1987 a second, even more massive volume of Chaudhuri autobiography was published, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* The first volume took us from his birth in 1897 in a small Bengali country town, "the son of a lawyer of the lowest rank," as he later says, to the wretchedness of academic failure, after brilliant promise, in Calcutta in 1921. The second volume went from that year, via career disasters, penury, the war and Indian independence, to his retirement from All-India Radio in 1952 (retirement was fixed early by the British because of the strain of working in India, and the Indians continued this), by which time a tremendous creative block had at last been removed and he had published the first volume to enormous acclaim and hostility. But perhaps the most extraordinary thing about the appearance of *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* was the discovery that Mr. Chaudhuri was still alive. And what was more, he was living not in up-country Bengal but in, of all places, north Oxford.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri is liberal, a product of the Bengali humanism which developed in the nineteenth century and faded in the twentieth, whose flower was Tagore. He is puritanical, a Hindu born in the Victorian age who came to manhood in Calcutta when it was the greatest city in Asia and the second city of the British Empire. He exemplifies one of the most important functions of authorship, the upbraiding of one's contemporaries for having fallen short of some superior state (in his case this is posited as "the past"). And now at ninety-two, still in possession of all his faculties and organs, still writing, this man—brilliant, chastening, exasperating, apparently in-

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extinguishable—is a conundrum that has to be witnessed.

Chaudhuri's house in north Oxford turns out rather to resemble its occupant: Edwardian, toylike, but with plenty of room within and solidly constructed. Mr. Chaudhuri himself is immediately at the door, a little man in Bengali clothes, moving with the alertness and elasticity of a child, but, unlike a child, he is perfectly groomed. He is also overflowing with vivacity and good humor. The effect of this bizarre triumph over time is quite shocking, accustomed as we are to people falling to bits after fifty.

And he is in full flood the moment we meet—talking excitedly, rapidly, with variations of pitch and rhythm and howls of laughter. But it is difficult to interrupt or divert, so if much of what follows comes in blocks of loquacity, this is because for him talk is not so much conversation as it is like writing, an individual form of expression, at best a clash of wills. The first thing one wants to know is why he is at Oxford.

"Nothing in my life has been planned. Never have I applied for a job in my whole life. I've been *asked*. The family of the scholar Professor Max Müller asked me to write a biography of him. I agreed because my interest as a writer is in the interaction between Europe and India. He was one of the key figures and all the papers are in the Bodleian. So I came here from Delhi in 1970. I found I could work more comfortably."

"In this climate?"

"No, at Oxford rather than in London. In this climate *of course*! That is no question!"

In 1979 Mr. Chaudhuri was still here, having just published his third book to be written in England, *Hinduism* (the biography of Müller came out in 1974 and *Clive of India* in 1975). At a conference for Commonwealth literature, a director of Chatto & Windus asked his wife what they planned to do now, and she said they had to return to India because they had run through all their money. The director replied, "Shall I come tomorrow with a contract? Mr. Chaudhuri should write the second part of his autobiography."

"But let me tell you," Mr. Chaudhuri interjects here, "all my writings are really about myself. Egoism of the worst kind! All writers are very self-centered, have to be, though some project this onto others."

So they stayed in England, and in 1980 decided it would not do to return to India again, especially because Mr. Chaudhuri had never been particularly well in his own country.

"Although I was born in the tropics and lived there until my seventy-third year, I never got used to the heat. Cold does not trouble me at all. And the light here is like a perpetual dawn, which I like, but when it's sunny, it's wonderful—brightness without glare."

What is more, Mrs. Chaudhuri is now disabled with arthritis, as well as having had three heart attacks. They have three sons. One is a professor of economic history at London University; the other two are in India, one an industrialist, the other in television. There is a grandson in London, at Westminster School, and a granddaughter in India, but no great-grandchildren because, he says, "I married late, at thirty-four, which is very late for a Hindu." So, presumably, did his sons.

"To what do . . ."

"Wait a minute. Apart from that, I cannot go back because I never eat any Indian food. It doesn't agree with me. From 1948 I have survived only on meat, milk products, vegetables, fruit."

Their social life is entirely European. Mr. Chaudhuri adds a curious fact—that in these twenty years in England, only two other Indian families have visited their house.

"To what do you ascribe your longevity?" I mispronounce the word, with a hard *g*, and he gently suggests that this might be incorrect.

"I started my first book when I was six months short of fifty. I gave myself an expectation of life of two years. I was always frail, and suffering at that time from heart troubles. And I thought, Shall I die without leaving anything behind? And this book gave me a kind of new life. Do you know how old I am? Yes, now listen—I still do the gardening myself. Every plant here I have planted. Physical exertion must be maintained to the end of life to the extent you can undertake it. In the garden I know the exact limit—after half an hour I leave off digging, rest fifteen minutes. Thirdly, healthy diet is necessary. I discovered what to eat but couldn't put it into practice until 1948 because of money problems. I have never met an Englishman even thirty years younger than I who doesn't have a

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bent back. But look at mine—straight!"

He stands to attention, facing away from me, heels together, hands smartly down at his sides, pleased as punch. "Fourthly, the *violent*" [when he emphasizes a word, his voice often makes a glissando up to a warbling falsetto] "dislike all Hindus have for any recreation—but from 1945 I decided I'll never work after lunch!"

"What time do you get up?"

"Five o'clock in the morning. I have found that if I write anything in the afternoon, I have to throw it away the next day, so why should I waste my time?"

Thereafter Mr. Chaudhuri never went back to the office after lunch. He was working for All-India Radio, writing talks for broadcast, but as long as the work was completed on time, they permitted this behavior. At the moment he is sitting on a chair beside the fireplace, legs crossed, hands clasped round his knee, in fine cotton Bengali clothes. He believes that wearing these loose, easy clothes can add ten years to one's life. It would be terrible to encase this sprite in fitted clothes, but in fact he usually wears Western dress out of doors.

"I'm a believer in authenticity. I have three evening dresses including the tail. Nowadays you don't see a hat on anybody—but I have six hats."

He says that recreation is as necessary as food, and he adopts a new recreation every five years—without giving up the old one. Gardening, listening to European music, walking, architecture, nature. This exceedingly systematic approach to pleasure is very Bengali—and indeed very Victorian. He also advises some external changes—for example, he recently switched two pictures round in the hall. Mr. Chaudhuri then moves on to his hi-fi equipment, a strange ensemble of items with homemade adjustments, which he explains in painstaking detail.

"I cannot afford first-class equipment, so using my grey cells—as Poirot says in the Agatha Christie novels—I have raised third-class equipment to the second class. It took me seven months simply to place the speakers properly. They are angled towards each other and upwards—the alignment when sitting on this sofa should be three or four inches above the ear—I know something about acoustics. The ideal for domestic listening is a room fifteen feet by nine, exactly the size of this one—a fortunate accident."

"I'll change the subject . . ."

"No, longevity, so this is an interest in living. Which is writing, too. Look, here is the most widely circulated Bengali magazine with a picture of me writing—when I write Bengali I always write on the floor with a pen but when I write English it's always on a typewriter at table. One extraordinary thing—I write *terribly* fast. *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*—nine-and-one-half months only—and working in government service at the same time. Because I never sit down to write until I have the words in my head. Another extraordinary thing—I am the only major writer in India who writes in two languages. Either they do it in the mother tongue or in English."

Mr. Chaudhuri's psychological method is to surrender himself to the subject—and at some point the subject dictates the form of its expression. He cites the example of Michelangelo who, when asked how he captured the beautiful face of Night without making any mistake, replied that he had no trouble at all, because the statue was already in the marble block and he had only to chip away the little pieces of marble round it. This explains why Chaudhuri's books are original in form as well as in content. He has meanwhile taken down a volume on Michelangelo to verify the reference and to show me the statue's beautiful expression. Mr. Chaudhuri sits beside me on the sofa, tapping my knee and arm, grinning with a pixie-like face. The only obvious signs of aging are laugh lines and mottling of the complexion.

For a bibliophile the books in his house are few and unremarkable. His library of five thousand volumes remains in India. Here volumes of *The Joy of Knowledge* stand alongside the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and popular editions of the classics. The furniture is plain, in no particular style, and although he declares that all the prints are eighteenth century, his effects are not those of a moneyed man. But, clearly, he has escaped the poverty of earlier days. What are the other advantages of old age?

"I have all the advantages of experience, retaining all the enthusiasm of youth! The reception of one's work heartens one at the end of life—because I have struggled against

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abuse ever since I began to write. But to sacrifice conviction for popularity is the worst mistake a writer can make. In 1898 Kipling's *Jungle Book* sold only thirty-four copies. *Gone With the Wind*—probably the novel with the *highest* sales in the history of fiction—not even mentioned in the article on American fiction in the encyclopedia. Not even mentioned! There is no creation without individualism. Our individualism is given to us so that we will add something to creation. And unless you are doing something creative, you have no right to individualism."

On the great individuals from the past he can be scathing.

GANDHI: I have always condemned abnormal asceticism like Gandhi's because I say anything which is anti-physiological, anti-biological cannot be moral. No human being in moral conduct can be higher than a wild animal—because in nature there is no conflict.

MOUNTBATTEN: What a bounder!

KRISHNAMURTI: Charlatan, utter charlatan! All these wretched Hindus exploiting Western superstition. I lost my faith in everything religious at the age of eighteen, nineteen.

Churchill is the public figure of modern times he most admires. His greatest love is for the writers of English and French literature. "But from 1925 I have not tried to keep up-to-date. I'm the only man in India who had the complete works of Pascal in fourteen volumes." For his fellow Bengali, Tagore, he also has great respect. "But! He was very hostile to his own people, maladjusted—exactly like me!"

Chaudhuri calls India the continent of Circe, after the goddess who turned all visitors to her island into swine. He has not been back since 1970. India is the creation of foreigners—Aryan, Persian, British—but India drags them all down. The terrible color prejudice among Hindus, for example, is explained by the fact that the Aryans were Europeans by origin, from south Russia.

"And they have never forgotten their original complexion. Now listen, I'll tell you, I never saw my wife before the wedding night. A relative came and warned me: what are you going to do, marrying a dark girl and you a poor journalist and you will get some dark daughters and never be able to marry them. A mother reproaches her daughter: Why are you so stuck-up? You will never get married with your dark complexion. I knew a young girl reproached like this, daughter of a vice-chancellor of a university, and she hanged herself and died. Diabolically cruel!"

And it's all growing worse, in Mr. Chaudhuri's view. "There is no psychological subtlety among modern Indians. They are crude. I am too complex for them. England is decadent, the young people are savages, but here I can still live according to the lights I have always known."

Of modern Britain, he likes nothing. But there is a timeless Britain—landscape, country houses, claret, Shakespeare, cathedral towns, bespoke tailors, Oxford bells—which sustains him.

"One thing which frightens my wife and me—we never talk about it—it would be horrible for one of us to leave without the other. Who shall go first? She is just eighty, and for the first fifty years of our married life she was the stronger and I was the invalid. Now it is the other way round. Just we two live in this house."

Where will he be buried?

"The other day somebody said do you have dining rights in any college, and I said no, and he said you should have, and I said what does it matter, I'm soon going to the Oxford Crematorium!" Explosive mirth. "I have an odd feeling that there's a kind of resentment in the academic community that I'm here, a non-academic poking his nose in, pretending to be learned when he is not."

But one must not be sentimental about human beings who reach the age of ninety-two. They, after all, are not sentimental about us. Will we save the ecology? Mr. Chaudhuri doubts that this can be accomplished by idiots. "Although the Indians are morons squared, you at least are morons!" The Americans he considers the most degenerate people in the world. This leads him on to the destructiveness of the motor car and television, the collapse of family life and sexual morality, and at this point, for the first time, he begins to take on something of the cliché of every old man who says that the world has gone to the dogs—things, inevitably, were better then. But when wasn't the world decadent according to somebody or other? His latest line speaks to the Hinduization of the British people, how they've taken on habits of slovenliness and viciousness which they ve-

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hemently condemned in their Indian subjects.

"When my wife was well we would have guests for a five-course dinner or four-course lunch. And always three wines at table and never serve a wine except in its proper glass!"

In the course of Mr. Chaudhuri's harangues, he bursts with laughter, rushes to the bookcase, and reads (removing his spectacles) not quotations but chunks. He quotes much from memory in English and French. Kipling he quotes many times (and has written that the ruling Englishman in India "resented our devotion to English literature as a sort of illicit attention to his wife . . ."). A lifetime of feeling the outsider has made him fearless in his opinions and one might say almost over-integrated in his mentation. But this is tempered by sweetness of character, terrifically high spirits, and a delightful candor.

"Do you dream at night?"

"Horrible dreams! For twenty years I dream almost every other night but only about India and every dream a nightmare. I'm drowning, being crushed, not having anything to eat. I have lived a happy life in my own way, but why do I never dream of anything pleasant in India? Last night I dreamed that I was in a horrible Indian landscape, lost, couldn't find my way, oooh terrible! I love Indian architecture, but I dream only of ruins or labyrinths."

He pops out and returns with crisps and Löwenbrau beer on a tray. "Oh yes, no one will say I'm a sensible person. Totally mad! And even though we live in a world of cultural, social, and environmental decay brought about by technological progress, I try to be an optimist." Squeals of laughter. "Perhaps a new generation will arise out of the desert, so I quote Racine—sing, people, sing! I said this to Bertrand Russell and he said, 'But I shan't live to see it.' I wanted to say 'What does it matter whether Bertrand Russell lives to see it?' But I didn't. Since I don't believe in an afterlife, I think we come into the world not for ourselves but for the sake of the world."

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SCIENCE

Two Extraordinary Electrical Experiments

IRVING M. KLOTZ and JOSEPH J. KATZ

Creation of Life

On December 31, 1836, the *Somerset County Gazette*, in Somerset, England, published a feature article headlined "extraordinary experiment." In this article the publisher described some remarkable observations recently made by Andrew Crosse, a wealthy English country gentleman who also had a respected reputation as a natural philosopher with a private, spectacular laboratory. Living mites had been generated in an electrical apparatus constructed by Crosse.

The justification for first announcement and publication in a newspaper, as stated by the publisher, W. Bragg, was: "We trust that by this early publishing and awarding them to their proper owner, we shall prevent much unfair appropriation of the honor of his brilliant researches by those who have no title to it." Andrew Crosse had *not* authorized the announcement. His contemporaries were unanimous in noting that Crosse shunned public fame.

Generation of Cold Fusion Energy

On March 23, 1989, the *Wall Street Journal* featured an article headlined "development of atom fusion to be unveiled." In this article the newspaper described some remarkable observations recently made by Martin Fleischmann and Stanley Pons, two respected professors of chemistry (British and American, respectively) working in a well-equipped laboratory at the University of Utah. This article also disclosed that a press conference was to be held that day by the University of Utah to announce that "its scientists had achieved a sustained nuclear reaction at room temperature under conditions that exist naturally."

Justification for a press conference before formal publication in a scientific journal, as described by Pons in a report in *Science*, was based on "rumors circulating about the work, patent considerations and the fact that he already has a paper on the work accepted." As also reported in *Science*, the vice president for research at Utah added that "too much was circulating about the experiment—rumors, leaks, questions and false information." The latter report noted further that, if the discovery was confirmed, "Pons and Fleischmann would be shoo-ins for a Nobel prize." *Science* also alluded to rumors of attempts to steal credit for the discovery and concerns about patent rights.

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The revelation by the *Gazette* was promptly picked up by hundreds of other newspapers and magazines all across the British Isles. Within a week everyone was aware of the creation of life by electricity, and, as pointed out by J. A. Secord in a historical essay entitled "Extraordinary Experiment," most people presumed it was an experimental fact. This experiment produced an international sensation.

On March 24, 1989, the *New York Times*, and many other newspapers, reported that, at a press conference the preceding day, "Dr. B. Stanley Pons announced that he and Dr. Martin Fleischmann had conducted 'a surprisingly simple experiment' in which the nuclei of heavy hydrogen atoms were forced to fuse at room temperature producing energy."

Within a week everyone was aware of a revolutionary new electrical device for generating nuclear energy. Most people presumed it was an experimental fact. This experiment produced an international sensation.

The essence of the experimental arrangement was to have two electrodes submersed in an aqueous solution of potassium silicate and to pass current, from a voltaic cell, through the solution. An iron wire was connected to the positive pole of the voltaic cell, and a silver wire to the negative pole. After periods of a month or months (depending on the geometry and other features of the apparatus) small insects, *acari*, emerged abundantly from the electrified surfaces.

The essence of the experimental arrangement (actually first disclosed in the *London Financial Times* on March 23, 1989) was to have two electrodes submersed in an aqueous, heavy-water solution of a lithium salt and to pass current through the solution. A palladium rod was made the negative electrode, and a platinum wire the positive electrode. After a suitable period of operation, abundant quantities of heat appeared, much in excess of the electrical energy being put into the apparatus, and nuclear particles were generated.

Andrew Crosse was a member of the London Electrical Society. His formal publication of his discoveries was presented in the *Transactions and the Proceedings of the London Electrical Society, from 1837 to 1840*, published in 1841, under the title "Description of some experiments made with the Voltaic Battery . . . in the process of which experiments certain insects constantly appeared." As early as 1837, however, he had sent letters to leading scientists describing his electrically generated insects.

Martin Fleischmann and Stanley Pons are members of the Electrochemical Society. Their publication of their discoveries (with footnote acknowledgment to their co-worker Marvin Hawkins) was first published in the *Journal of Electroanalytical Chemistry*, in 1989, under the title "Electrochemically induced nuclear fusion of deuterium." Well before this manuscript appeared in print it had been spread worldwide (like a virus) by transmission by fax.

At least one individual, W. H. Weekes, a surgeon and expert in atmospheric electricity and electrical instrumentation, interested in biological uses of electricity, was able to replicate Crosse's observations. He christened his electrically generated insects *Acarus crossii*. Powerful support for Crosse was also supplied by P. Turpin, a distinguished French naturalist and a member of the French Academy of Sciences, who identified the electrically produced mites as a *new* species of Acarus *(Acarus horridus)*, which thereby ruled out contamination as an explanation of Crosse's observations.

Experimental confirmation of various aspects of the discovery was promptly provided by groups of investigators at Georgia Institute of Technology, Stanford University, Texas A & M University, University of Minnesota, University of Utah metallurgy and mines laboratories, and theoretical support was produced by theoreticians at the University of California at Berkeley and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Outside of the United States, research workers in the Soviet Union, Hungary, Brazil, and India reported verifications of the Utah observations.

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In Crosse's first experiments "perfect insect[s]" were formed after twenty-six days of electrical current flow, and they wriggled their legs on the twenty-eighth day. Subsequent experiments required "some months' electrical action" to generate the insects. Weekes reported that, in his experiments, over a year passed before insects appeared.

Two respected experts on electricity, J. G. Children and G. Bird, independently repeated Crosse's experiments without and then with precautions to exclude outside air, but they found no signs of living insects. In the 1840s two other established electrical experts, H. Noad and A. Smee, with strong attachments to electrobiology, independently attempted to reproduce Crosse's observations, but they failed. J. E. Gray suggested that the mites found by Crosse had been hatched from eggs that had contaminated and survived in Crosse's apparatus. Still another rationalization of Crosse's findings was offered by W. Buckland, an Oxford geologist. Since silicaceous rocks were known to have fossil remains of insects, Crosse, using a silicaceous matrix through which electricity passed, "released . . . the germs . . . from their prison house" into an environment that allowed them to spring "to life after a sleep of thousands of years."

The mite experiments were widely discussed, in scientific circles (for instance, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the Royal Institution, the French Academy of Sciences, the Ashmolean Society) and in the popular press. Crosse welcomed anyone—scientist, journalist, or interested laymen—who visited his laboratory, and he displayed his experiments with enthusiasm. Since the work touched on the nature of life, it

In the original press conference, Fleischmann stated that "this generation of heat continues over long periods" and reported that some cells have produced a steady output of heat for several hundred hours. According to him, "our indications are that the discovery will be relatively easy to make into a usable technology for generating heat and power." Some months later it was reported increasingly frequently that the experiments had to run continuously for weeks or months for excess heat to be produced. Then this heat appeared in bursts.

Some of the confirming laboratories have detected tritium, others have seen neutrons, during the operation of the electrolytic cells. Unfortunately there seems to be no coincident production of excess heat, tritium, and neutrons.

Other laboratories, including those at Los Alamos, Harwell, Lawrence Livermore, and California Institute of Technology, were unable to verify the reports of Pons and Fleischmann. Scientists at Harwell operated the cells for periods of up to six weeks but could not observe the heats claimed by Pons and Fleischmann.

Fleischmann attributed failures to a need for very high current densities for very long periods so that the electrode should be polarized for a long time to generate the bursts of heat. "Heroic electrochemistry" is essential he said.

A panel of scientists appointed by the U.S. Department of Energy visited the Pons and Fleischmann and other laboratories and reported that "the evidence for the discovery of a new nuclear process termed cold fusion isn't persuasive." None of the members of the panel was lucky enough to be visiting a laboratory at a time when one of its electrolytic cells was producing excess energy.

In the fall of 1989, a special workshop was

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was pertinent to then-current controversies about religion, atheism, materialism, natural law, miracles, evolution. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, when studies of electricity were in their infancy, widespread awareness of electricity-discharging fish and of Volta's experiments with frog muscle made considerations of "electricity and life" a very lively issue.

Questions were raised about the possibility of contamination, a frequent defect in claims of spontaneous generation. In his original experiments in the 1830s, Crosse had not taken the precaution of excluding outside air during his early electrical experiments.

Distinguished physicists of the time, among them Michael Faraday and Joseph Henry, were skeptical of Crosse's results. Nevertheless, some popular journals circulated a false rumor, of unknown origin, that Faraday had repeated and confirmed Crosse's experiments. By public letters and oral statements, Faraday tried valiantly but unsuccessfully to disavow this false claim. Nevertheless, over a century later, the popular science media continued to propagate this myth, which reappeared as recently as 1979. In the early 1960s, the Royal Institution, Faraday's lifetime scientific base, was flooded with student inquiries about the electrical creation of living insects.

convened by the National Science Foundation and the Electric Power Research Institute. The meeting was closed to the public, but a press conference was held at the conclusion. Subsequent press reports differed in their assessments, the *New York Times* headline reading: "Recent Tests Said to Justify More Cold Fusion Research," that of *Science* reading: "Cold Fusion: Smoke, Little Light."

Questions were raised about suitable control experiments with ordinary water, apparently not carried out at the time of the original announcement. Subsequent reports from Stanford University asserted that more heat is obtained from electrolytic cells filled with heavy water than from those with common water.

Physicists in general have greeted the fusion claims with skepticism and scorn. In contrast, at the 1989 spring meeting of the American Chemical Society, chemists "were tickled pink that it was chemists who discovered [cold fusion]." In the fall, the distinguished physicists Edward Teller and Paul Chu expressed opinions supporting the possibility of electrical cold fusion. Shortly thereafter two independent critical analyses of the cold fusion experiments were published by groups at California Institute of Technology and at Harwell, the latter also describing extensive new experiments, and both concluded that claims for energy production by cold fusion could not be sustained. Perhaps it is not surprising to find the following conclusion articulated in a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* from a public-spirited citizen: "The promise of such a discovery is mind-boggling, yet the Department of Energy (DOE) deems the concept valueless. I am sure there is great pressure being levied against the DOE by gas, oil, coal and nuclear energy suppliers from all over the world, including the banking institutions carrying billions of dollars of loans out to these and related industries to quiet this discovery and subsequent investigations. To keep the flame of cold fusion alive, it will require much pressure. . . . "

People yearn to believe.

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The Literary Financier

HAROLD JAMES

One of the most interesting and also one of the most characteristic nineteenth-century-novel forms dealt with financial scandal. Balzac, Trollope, even Thomas Mann used the financial swindler as a way of building a picture of a complete social world. Their creations now look dated. Serious literature has moved a long way from this kind of topic, leaving it to journalistic accounts such as John Brooks's *The Go-Go Years*, or Connie Bruck's recent *The Predators' Ball*, or to the ghosted memoirs of famous business leaders of the Donald Trump and Lee Iacocca variety, or to populist cinematic depictions: films such as Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* (1987) or Mike Nichols's improbably escapist fantasy *Working Girl* (1988). Serious novels have on the whole ceased to play a major role in popular reading. For highbrow literature, internal psychological conflicts, the angst of the soul, or misery and deprivation, the angst of the street, are acceptable topics; the angst of the stock exchange is not. It is tempting to ask why, in an age wracked and obsessed by insider dealing, corrupt "arbs" and manipulation of commodity markets, we do not revive the fine tradition of immortalizing commercial impropriety in the imagination.

The financier was one of the great types of the nineteenth-century novel. He appeared as an enormously powerful master magician whose art lay in making things seem what they were not—a manipulator of the senses and of the intellect. Money lends itself easily to such a theme, because of the way it establishes equivalences between otherwise unlike objects. It plays alchemical tricks and makes personal transformations. How else can metal be changed into food? Or how do ugly old men attract beautiful young women? The mystery of exchange fascinated this age; and many figures thought, as did Karl Marx, that exchange must involve both fetishism and deception. Novels took up the mystical and mythical drama of money. They also usually had a distinct shape: at the end of the day, the mystification is unmasked and the machinations of high finance are frustrated.

Part of the charm of the financier novel was undoubtedly that it simply described, in a welter of detail, a new and highly colorful universe that was just beginning to emerge: the world of the fledgling stock exchange, of stock manipulation, and the dizzying alternation of spells of near universal prosperity with sudden catastrophe and widespread ruination. The prosperity and its collapse had a much more immediate effect on a relatively wide reading public directly dependent as rentiers on securities as a source of income. The centrality of finance astonished observers. Money, observed Heine, was the god of the age and Rothschild his prophet. The Exchange had become a great social center—as is clear from the increasingly ornate and quite explicitly temple-like buildings that it occupied. From Brongniart's and Labarre's Corinthian columns for the Paris bourse (1808–27) through William Strickland's Merchants' Exchange Building in Philadelphia (1832–34) and Georg Heinrich Friedrich Hitzig's Berlin bourse (1859–63) to George Post's New York Exchange at the turn of the century, neoclassical buildings signaled the cult of money. Novelists set out to celebrate and also to explain it.

The financier as portrayed in the novel goes

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well beyond any basis in real life. He became so popular because he embodied a mysterious underground power. The nineteenth century loved explanations of events by conspiracy theories. Revolutions could be understood as the product of secret societies and brotherhoods that spread out all over Europe in the aftermath of the French Revolution with the goal of a complete overthrow of the existing order. Those societies found their match in swarms of anonymously dressed Jesuits dispatched from Rome throughout the world with a single mission—counter-revolution. Yet another new order resulted from the men of money, looking like sinister black beetles in their frock coats and top hats. Socialist conspiracy, Jesuit conspiracy, bankers' conspiracy: the three ideas fed off one another, and each version reinforced the notion of a world underlain by another hidden and infernal world. The mysterious brotherhoods worked with insider information—secret politics, secret codes, secret oaths, secret handshakes, and secret dealings—in order to transform the world. Honoré de Balzac provided one of the finest literary versions of this collective paranoia in his picture of a league of the "thirteen," dedicated to a clandestine life in which their real connections would remain obscure forever: "all struck with the same idea and all endowed with sufficient energy to remain faithful to a single purpose."

The power that these conspiracies unleashed was so spectacular that it in the end destroyed the conspirators as well. This corresponded to a second great nineteenth-century doctrine: that revolutions inevitably destroy themselves, because they set off a force so powerful that they cannot contain it. The doctrines of classical economics gave a logic to this view of the inevitability of the failure of individual initiative. This discipline no longer attempted to be simply a system of moral and philosophical analysis as in the eighteenth century. It was instead a fully scientific theory, which presented a dynamic of vast impersonal and compelling forces in the face of which the individual was powerless, and in whose clutches he was a prisoner.

The financial novel of the nineteenth century depended on this naturalistic approach to social change. It almost reduced the process to a formula. The author works away at the analogy of the market to nature—of the struggle of the fittest in business and in species—for all that this overused metaphor would bear. The parallel is worked out most explicitly, and even perhaps tediously, in a powerful German novel about speculation, Friedrich Spielhagen's *Sturmflut* (Floodstorm) of 1877—an almost perfect example of the genre.

Spielhagen was a German liberal. The son of an engineer, he believed that his purpose was to extol the simple life of middle-class commercial virtue. From the book's title to its conclusion, Spielhagen never relaxes or lets the analogy drop. Speculation is like building defenses against the sea: sooner or later a wild storm destroys everything. The characters again and again draw the parallel: "Here too," in commerce, says a wise old Prussian civil servant, who offers a running commentary through the pages of the novel, "the normal path of things has been interrupted in the most surprising way, here too the floods have been piled up and then flowed out in a terrible storm—a storm of gold, my ladies—from West to East."

The novel deals with a plan to construct a new railway line and a harbor on a German island in the Baltic. The financing of the scheme is carried out by a fraudulent financier, Philipp Schmidt, in league with a corrupt and immoral and cowardly aristocrat. Like most financial novels, Spielhagen took at least a partial foundation in contemporary reality. There had indeed been a terrible and destructive storm in the Baltic in 1872, one year before a dramatic stock exchange crash, in which many aristocrats who had placed their trust in a railway building scheme were ruined. One of the figures in the story, the deputy who denounces the project in the Prussian parliament, Eduard Lasker, was in fact a "real person," who had played the key part in the onslaught on real speculators.

But the fiction, predictably, goes well beyond reality. Schmidt is only in part a manipulator; he is also a victim of a much more sinister influence, a foreign intriguer named Grimaldi. This dark figure, endowed with a Mephistophelian capacity not simply to materialize suddenly at critical moments but also to read minds, lures to their destruction both the weak-willed son Ottomar of an upright incorruptible Prussian General von Werben, and Philipp Schmidt, the ambitious son of a bourgeois factory owner. Grimaldi rather than Schmidt is the true satanic manipulator of reality.

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One of the themes of the novel is how the old order disappears under the onslaught of speculation. Historic Prussia had depended on a hierarchical order that went with a strict moral code; it had a leadership inculcated with an iron sense of mission and duty. Financial power means not just corruption, but also simply transformation and change—a change that makes a nonsense out of the virtues associated in the past with hierarchy. Once everything has become egoistical and corrupt, the distinctions on which the Prussian order rested simply crumble. Von Werben meditates about his son's disgrace: "Where is the difference between a nobleman and officer, and an actor who runs away from his creditors or a salesman who takes off with his employers' cash—where is the difference between Ottomar von Werben and Mr Philipp Schmidt? There is none—the bourgeois bankrupt and the aristocratic forger are both in the same position." And the wise old Prussian civil servant comes in with the refrain: "We are beginning to live off illusion, off slippery, useless illusion. Take this railroad affair—it's illusion wherever you look." And again, "A people cannot dance forever around the Golden Calf and sacrifice to Moloch; it will either drown in the flood provoked by its sins, or it needs to cling to the rescuing rock provided by true, manly bourgeois virtue." Again: "How can we keep our position in the state and in society and still retain our moral qualities. This is often a hard task, perhaps an impossible one—the squaring of a circle."

At the climax of the novel, Philipp Schmidt is unmasked as a scoundrel at the spectacular feast to celebrate the completion of his new and lavishly ornamented city *palais*. On the same evening a flood washes over the Baltic island: "The storm which today raged through the debate in the Chamber of Deputies will rip the roofs off many joint stock factories, shake many big houses which this morning stood firm and dominated the Stock Exchange, and bring others down." The flood is a purgation that washes away the stagnant waters of corruption. The corrupt, lascivious aristocrat is reduced to an intimidated and gibberingly incoherent wreck before he is literally swept away by the storm waves. After the storm, after Schmidt is unmasked, and after the young von Werben tries to flee when his father has told him flatly that he should commit suicide, the air is clear. Decency, order, and morality return. The brave and virtuous daughter of General von Werben marries a brave and virtuous cousin of Philipp Schmidt, and aristocratic and bourgeois sagacity and sense are symbolically linked.

This is, in other words, a fairy story, a completely improbable massaging of the natural metaphor in order to support a trite morality lesson: pay your debts on time, don't live beyond your means, neither a borrower nor a lender be, and so on through the great treasury of middle-class platitudes. What is striking is how widespread this use of the imagery of nature became to depict the sure and certain penalty that would follow from commercial hubris. Gustav Freytag's earlier *Soll und Haben* (1855) was far more imaginatively constructed than Spielhagen's novel, but the lessons and the maxims are the same. The work deals with a classic struggle between good and evil, between honest commerce that involves decent labor and sound knowledge and dishonest profiteering. The honest and self-sufficient merchant is held up against the unserious playboy aristocrat, the incompetent noble landlord, and the rapacious Jewish financier. And the son of the grasping usurer states baldly, "I'll be blown away by the storm wind."

This way of thinking was not just a feature of German writing. The same natural metaphor occurs, embedded in the same structure of rise and decline of the financier and eventual triumph of common sense, in Anthony Trollope's bleakest and gloomiest work, *The Way We Live Now*, which was originally published in installments between February 1874 and September 1875. Like Spielhagen's book, it is set explicitly at the time of the speculative mania of the early 1870s and the crash of 1873. Again there is the wider indictment of a corrupt society. Again an aristocratic offspring, Sir Felix Carbury, is lured into greater and greater debt and deeper disgrace. He systematically deceives his mother, his friends, his fiancée. Like Spielhagen's weak-willed aristocrat, Sir Felix in his desperation tries to use the banker, whom he sneers at as the "surfeited sponge of speculation, this crammed commercial cormorant." Once again it is a foreign swindler, Augustus Melmotte, who builds close links with unscrupulous or stupid noblemen in order to get fine names to back his railroad speculation. The South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway is in fact un-

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likely ever to succeed. Again he is unmasked—he has forged title deeds—at the height of his success, when he is about to become a major political figure, at a banquet he holds in celebration of his new social eminence. And eventually, as with Spielhagen, the respectable and decent aristocrat, Sir Felix's modest and charming sister Hetty, marries a bourgeois who has resisted the temptations of wild commerce.

Augustus Melmotte is physically unprepossessing, "a large man, with dusky whiskers and much thick hair, with heavy eyebrows, and a wonderful look of power about his mouth and chin." Like Grimaldi, his origins, in a faraway country, are completely obscure; and there is a hint that he may be Jewish. And like Spielhagen's financial genius, he has superhuman qualities. He apparently can create something out of nothing. His house in Grosvenor Square is a "fairy land" in which money literally transforms things. Finance is all to do with unleashing a wild imagination: "A railway from Salt Lake City to Mexico no doubt had much of the flavor of a castle in Spain. Our far-western American brethren are supposed to be imaginative. Mexico has not a reputation among us for commercial security, or that stability which produces its four, five or six per cent with the regularity of clockwork."

But this is a world of illusion. Eventually, vast natural forces catch up with the would-be superman. Melmotte had "studied the criminal law, so that he might be sure in his reckonings; but he had always felt that he might be carried by circumstances into deeper waters than he intended to enter"; and the storm eventually breaks loose. Trollope uses the same tempest imagery as Spielhagen. "His life had been made dark by similar clouds before now, and he had lived through the storms that had followed them." Yet again: "Of course sooner or later some man must come with a thunderbolt." It destroys him, and he kills himself with prussic acid.

Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier* was published in 1912, but looks back to the same financial upheaval that had inspired Spielhagen and Trollope, the boom and bust of the 1870s. It is much less formulaic than the Spielhagen or Trollope stories of rise and ruin of the over-bold and overly unscrupulous financial genius. But this novel, too, deals with the use of social contacts and snobbery in business, with privileged inside information, speculation, and eventual disgrace. The same sort of natural metaphors regularly recur, and again a strongly Darwinian tone prevails. In finance the fittest survive. The novel begins with the young Frank Cowperwood observing the slow day-by-day dismemberment of a squid by a lobster in a shop window. "That's the way it has to be, I guess, that squid wasn't quick enough." "It made a great impression on him. It answered in a rough way that riddle which had been annoying him so much in the past: 'How is life organized?' Things lived on each other—that was it. Lobsters lived on squid and other things. What lived on lobsters? Men, of course! Sure, that was it! And what lived on men? he asked himself. Was it other men?"

Cowperwood wants to become a financier not because the position brings wealth, but because it means power over other men. The transformative urge associated with financial inventiveness becomes a will to power: people, including all of Cowperwood's many women, are valued only as means to some end. He wants to transform them, and use them—never to deal with them as equals. Only in the last part of the trilogy—which Dreiser wrote at the end of his life and which was published posthumously—does Cowperwood have an equal relationship with another person, and that is the sure sign that his days as a creative financier are over. He has now become, as the title of this final book makes clear, *The Stoic* rather than *The Titan* or *The Financier.*

The financier is the man who makes the modern world, not because of his wealth but because of his obsession with power. Politicians, who depend on money to keep their pork barrels filled, are open to manipulation by a new breed of super-men.

> Few people have the sense of financial individuality strongly developed. They do not know what it means to be a controller of wealth, to have that which releases the sources of social action—its medium of exchange. In most people thoughts of financial supremacy are not high and strong. They want money, but not for money's sake. They want it for what it will buy in the way of simple comforts; whereas the financier wants it for what it will control—for what it will represent in the way of dignity, force, power.

The super-men are always vulnerable to the unexpected, to rapid changes in public opin-

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ion, to absurd coincidences, and to the effects of events far distant. After a fire in Chicago, Cowperwood's position in Philadelphia is destroyed. He has borrowed too much, and cannot last out the bear market. "The storm was on." Mortgaging his own house raises a substantial sum of money, but it is not enough to hold the position: "It was a very light anchor to windward in this swirling storm." Unlike Melmotte or Grimaldi, his disgrace is not complete. Eventually, after a spell in prison, Cowperwood restores his fortune by taking a bear position in the middle of the great panic of 1873. He has learned from his past exposure. The failure of the big railroad financing house of Jay Cooke & Co. was "a financial thunderclap in a clear sky. . . . No one could have been more surprised if snow had fallen amid the sunshine of a summer morn." More stormy weather: "Over there banks and trust companies were falling like trees in a hurricane." This becomes Cowperwood's great opportunity. "Like a wolf prowling under glittering, brittle stars in the night, he was looking down into the humble folds of ordinary men and seeing what their ignorance and their unsophistication would cost them."

The unmasking of the financier is a necessary ingredient in the melodrama. The author's dilemma in constructing his plot is that there is nothing in itself illegal or even dishonorable about financial activity: a point that Trollope emphasizes particularly clearly. Some of Trollope's financiers, such as the Jewish banker Mr. Brehgert in *The Way We Live Now*, are depicted with great sympathy. Brehgert is a straightforward man who behaves honestly, unlike the vain and snobbish aristocrat Longstaffe, who first sends his daughter to stay with the Melmottes in order to find a rich match, and then refuses to let her consider marrying Brehgert.

So the financier needs to do something illegal in order to conform with the dictates of the story line and with the formula of the novel. Trollope is actually not very good at handling this side of the plot. Melmotte is clearly unsympathetic enough and unscrupulous enough to deserve a comeuppance, but how? His offense is not directly connected with the major financial undertaking—the Pacific Railway scheme. It arises instead from Melmotte's need to spend lavishly and ostentatiously. The result is that he fails to hand over scrip for shares in the Railroad Company as part of a purchase of an estate from Longstaffe; and that he then mortgages the estate, although it is clearly legally not yet his. He is sufficiently confident that he can bully and confuse Longstaffe into acquiescence, but does not reckon with the greed and the gambling debts of Longstaffe's decadent son. After the full scandal is unveiled, Melmotte attempts to give a speech in the House of Commons while drunk, disgraces himself hopelessly, and then returns home to kill himself. From what we can work out while we read the novel, he really need not have done this—at least if we think that he is simply nothing more than a cynical man obsessed with wealth and power and indifferent to honor and morality. He is still a very rich man at his death.

Spielhagen and Dreiser in my view are not greater novelists than Trollope, but they handle the question of dishonesty much more neatly. In Spielhagen the scandal lies in the extent to which the capital of the railroad is not paid up, but is simply allocated gratis to the manipulators of the issuing syndicate. Cowperwood is ambitious and ruthless; he knows that he is playing a game against people who are both more powerful and more corrupt than himself, and he simply resolves to use the opportunities presented him by the weaknesses and limitations of his opponents. He is not corrupt, and his behavior in general is far from illegal. In *The Financier*, he attempts to build up a position in Philadelphia streetcars. When the panic sets in, and the men he has previously dealt with refuse him credit, he draws a check for sixty thousand dollars from the city treasury for city loan stock that he had bought but had not yet deposited in the sinking fund. This is a normal business transaction, but carried out in abnormal times; and he is aware that he risks a criminal charge if he were to go bankrupt before he can deliver the stock. On the other hand, he believes that he needs the money in order to turn round his position. It is too little, and he fails the next morning.

The discussion of Trollope points to one of the dilemmas in the development of the financier novel. The writer needs more and more technical sophistication in order simply to describe what is happening. Part of the charm of this genre of novel is the exact depiction, almost anatomization, of an arcane world. This is one of Dreiser's great successes, and it

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is not just a superficial one. We really know when we have finished reading how the Philadelphia Exchange works, or later how street car systems are constructed in Chicago.

This is one of the most obvious explanations for the decline of the genre since the end of the nineteenth century. It is for instance at first surprising that the boom and crash of the late 1920s produced no literature to rival those fine novels about 1873. The technicalities of stock manipulation had become much too complicated to be easily and at the same time convincingly depicted. It is striking that when bond traders appear in *The Great Gatsby*, as they frequently do, we never understand what they do or how they do it. They remain, deliberately, a puzzle, while the nineteenth-century novel had represented the operations of the Exchange in order to demystify it.

But this is not the chief reason for the decline of the finance novel. The classic format was concerned with change and with the decline of an old standard of behavior. The financier becomes a scourge to punish the greed and immorality of an old elite that can no longer remain true to the idea of its mission. The worst opprobrium is generally reserved by the authors for the exemplars of the corrupt aristocracy: by Trollope, for instance, for Sir Felix Carbury and his idle aristocratic friends in the gambling den—they know they are being cheated but do nothing about it, because they believe that they can sponge on others. They know that Melmotte is deceiving them, that directors' meetings at which there is no discussion but which are nevertheless "very comfortable" in "pecuniary result" are dangerous.

The financier as magician wreaks revenge on the feckless and improvident. Grimaldi eventually exposes all the corruption and intrigue of the Prussian aristocracy. Cowperwood is a frank and sensual individualist, and there is no doubt left by Dreiser that his actions are to the public advantage. Even Melmotte is not without virtue. He is, it is true, grotesquely and vulgarly ostentatious, but his concern for his daughter is not a sham.

Once the old society with the high claims of the old order no longer existed, the formula for the finance novel disappeared. It was not that financiers vanished—there were plenty of them. What was gone was the possibility of making a morality tale out of the life and destiny of the man of business.

Ivan Boesky or Sir James Goldsmith or Michael Milken could play the same part in underwriting fictional imitators as had the great nineteenth-century speculators: Baron Bethel Strousberg, Charles ("Joachim") Lefevre, General Charles Fremont, or Charles Yerkes. The world that surrounded those figures feels quite familiar to us; what was the entourage of ostentatious aristocrats and high-spending amoral parvenus surrounding the genius financiers but the yuppie community of the 1870s? The lavish designer interiors have since changed only in style; the fast race horses have simply been replaced by speeding Porsches.

It is tempting to think that the fictional type has also recently made a comeback. The protagonist of Tom Wolfe's huge commercial success, *Bonfire of the Vanities*, is an upper-crust WASP New York banker, but financial themes play little role in the plot and remain basically peripheral. In the film *Wall Street*, they are central, and some of the old themes are certainly back. Gordon Gekko is a sort of magician who can transform everything: stock prices move up when he says so; and he even starts to dictate tastes in clothes and in art (in real life too: the *Financial Times* in London carried articles by Lucia van der Post on how to dress like Michael Douglas's Gekko). Gekko also destroys other people's personalities in consequence. Eventually the fledgling arb Buddy Fox just stands there and plaintively asks, "Who am I?" There is also a fond depiction of the old world of decent honest manual labor that is deceived and destroyed by the financier.

The film is less successful than the nineteenth-century version of the same morality tale because its message is too simple. In the modern version, decency is doomed because of a practice and a doctrine of greed that have gone out of control. In the old version, the corruption was self-inflicted, and the aristocratic order asked for its own defeat. The glittering financier is a prisoner of a set of vast impersonal forces; and his appeal is that he is the avenging angel of change.

The late twentieth century has a different sensibility. There is no doubt that we remain as fascinated by the glamour of the big financier. When Michael Milken appeared in court in April 1989, he was applauded by a substantial and appreciative crowd. But we don't want to see his world as the response to our

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way of living—to draw the moral that the nineteenth-century writers saw very clearly. We don't believe that the proliferation of financiers is a consequence of our (not of their) yearning for affluence on the never-never, of the debt mentality, and of credit-card culture. Perhaps this is paradoxical. We are quite prepared to believe on the strength of popularized versions of academic sociological investigations that criminals are a "product of society" rather than of their own evil passions; but we are much less happy with the idea that "every society gets the financiers it deserves."

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If I Were a Chef, I'd Say

SAMUEL HAZO

Buy fresh, cook fresh, eat fresh.
What's brighter than new mint?
Better than bread when it's born?
Younger than breakfast?
For me
it's all one poem, even
the scraps.
If you observe me
in my kitchen dicing onions,
furling lettuce on a plate,
or boning yellow sole, you see me
at my most relaxed.
The honesty
of food does that.
It's like
returning to your body after
you've been thinking much too much
or like the love you make
when it's spontaneous and mutual.
You live within your skin and like
the feeling.
That's what I'm seeking
when the world perplexes me
enough to make me want
to cook.
Sidewalk religions
like jogging perplex me.
Fake
fruits on real tables
perplex me.
People who believe
before they think perplex me . . .
I'd rather speak in coriander,
garlic, basil, pepper,

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fennel and the herbs of Provençe . . .
With food you can't be fooled.
You cook it with respect to let
the savors bloom.
And while
you cook, you think of the
convergences.
How many years of breeding
to create the pork from this pig?
How many months to make
these peppers, carrots, onions
and potatoes?
How much is owed
to soil, climate, rainfall,
farmers, butchers, truckers,
hucksters and the luck of weather?
And what about my forebear's
forebear's forebear's art passed down
by blood and hand to mock
the centuries and make me what
I am?
All these present me
with this roast I'm now arranging
on a platter like a still life
to be eaten with the eyes.
I ring
the roast with pepper slivers,
carrot checkers, onions, skinned
potatoes and a rosary of parsley.
And there it steams and shines
for me—the Michelangelo of meat.
If that's not poetry, what's poetry?

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Of Sense and Sensibility

OLIVER RICE

Miss Austen, at twenty or so,
might well have gone out to India
as wife to a subaltern of empire,
memsahib before whom a rajah might have simpered
and elephants have strewn ceremonial flowers,
innocent pourer at matronly teas,
abhorrer of the untouchable squalor,
sleepless alien in the pagan night.
But no.

Might, then,
any of those years the novels were forming,
have gone down to London,
wed to a public man and occasional rake,
might have gone with a literary set,
town women and new thinkers,
might have taken the tour to Venice
and been delivered of an Oxford candidate.
But no. But no.

Still, the family annals confirm
that she was acquainted with the higher emotions
and many of the lower,
knew Shakespeare, after all, the myths, and the Bible,
had virile brothers and idle hours.
On piercing afternoons in Hampshire and Bath,
she must have had intimations enough
of Don Juan and Faust and Kubla Khan
to have peopled her stories with exotics,
with decadents and transcendentalists,
libertarians and melancholics.

But no. But no. But no.

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POETRY

Richard Wilbur's Difficult Balance

BRUCE BAWER

Some people were born to be poets; Richard Wilbur was born to be a Poet Laureate. Forget, if you wish, his distinguished good looks, his genteel manner in television interviews, the mellifluous yet authoritative voice in which he recites his work at poetry readings, and the tasteful tie and blazer he sports on the dust-jacket photograph of his recently published *New and Collected Poems*. He is, leaving all such things aside, the outstanding contemporary American instance of the type of poet who writes in strict forms about traditional themes, and whose poems—making, as they do, frequent, appropriate, and instructive use of meter, rhyme, imagery, alliteration, assonance, and even the occasional classical allusion—could serve as models in a textbook of prosody. (Poetry, Wilbur has written, "should include every resource which can be made to work.") If one wanted to compile a résumé for such a figure, one could not do better than Wilbur's: service in the European theater during World War II, a B.A. from Amherst, an M.A. from Harvard, faculty positions at Harvard, Wellesley, Wesleyan, and Smith, regular appearances in *The New Yorker*, a Bollingen, a Pulitzer, a Prix de Rome, a National Book Award, and—yes—a term as Poet Laureate.

If Allen Ginsberg represents one end of the postwar American poetry spectrum, Wilbur represents the other. While Ginsberg sees chaos and conspiracy in the world around him, Wilbur sees beauty and order; while Ginsberg conceives of poetry as an opportunity to vent defiant, anarchic, and often apocalyptic passions, Wilbur sees it as a means of articulating, with great poise and restraint, a sanguinary devotion to the enduring forms of nature and civilization. Wilbur's poetry is as self-effacing and mannerly as Ginsberg's is conceited and coarse; if Ginsberg may be described as wildly uneven, Wilbur is extraordinarily—well—*even*, a creator of poems that, while not uniformly arresting, have, since his widely hailed debut at age twenty-six with *The Beautiful Changes* (1947), evinced a remarkable consistency in thematic concerns, in general tonal and stylistic features, and in aesthetic proficiency. (Astonished though one is to learn that Wilbur eliminated nothing from his oeuvre in compiling his *New and Collected Poems*, one is even more astonished to discover, upon reading the book, that there are no poems in it that cry out to be eliminated.) If Ginsberg's diction is colloquial and frequently lewd, Wilbur's ranges from the elegantly plain to the ornately esoteric ("The walls / Are battlemented still. . . . Now all this proud royaume / Is Veniced"), and his lines are often crowded with the sort of sophisticated wordplay ("Lambs are constrained to bound"; "habitude, if not pure / Hebetude") in which Ginsberg would never indulge. While Ginsberg, moreover, has spent his career raucously attacking the American political and corporate establishment, Wilbur (while acknowledging what he has called "the full discordancy of modern life and consciousness") has written poems celebrating such bourgeois achievements as the construction of a new railway station in Rome. It should not come as a surprise, then, that critics who have applauded Ginsberg for the recklessness of his life and art have chided Wilbur for "playing it safe."

For all his prominence, however, Wilbur seems nearly marginal. We do not, after all, live in the Age of Wilbur. He began his career as one of his generation's two most celebrated

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American poets, along with his fellow formalist Robert Lowell (who was four years his senior); but while Lowell transformed himself into a confessional poet—helping, at the same time, to transform American poetry as well—Wilbur continued to write the sort of formal verse (though his lines did become slightly plainer and simpler over the years) that came to seem old hat. Many poets who have studied in creative-writing programs in recent decades have learned to regard meter and rhyme as ways of straightjacketing the soul; self-styled political poets, for their part, tend to regard them as tools of the System. Of the post–World War II American poets, the one whose name is most familiar to high school students today is not Wilbur or even Ginsberg but probably Sylvia Plath, whose angry, intense poems, in the nearly three decades since her death, have helped to convince countless young people that it is not a poet's reason, wit, or equipoise that matters, but his willingness to serve up raw, rude personal testimony. During Wilbur's middle age, indeed, the careers of Plath, Lowell, and their fellow confessional poets—among them John Berryman and Anne Sexton—constituted, for many romantic-minded readers, a veritable guidebook to the ways *real* poets thought and wrote and conducted their lives; to these readers, such a poet as Wilbur could only be considered out of step.

No one is more conscious of this state of affairs than Wilbur himself. Or such, at least, is the conclusion one comes to after reading Wilbur's poem "Cottage Street, 1953," in which he draws quite neatly the contrast between his own approach to poetry and that symbolized by Plath. The poem recalls a meeting between the two poets under the auspices of Wilbur's mother-in-law, Edna Ward. With ironic matter-of-factness, Wilbur recalls that he was present "to exemplify / The published poet in his happiness, / Thus cheering Sylvia, who has wished to die." Realizing that he was in a hopeless position, however, he compares himself to a "stupid life-guard" and Plath to "a girl / Who, far from shore, has been immensely drowned."

> How large is her refusal; and how slight
> The genteel chat whereby we recommend
> Life, of a summer afternoon, despite
> The brewing dusk which hints that it may end.

The poem's development offers a top-notch example of Wilbur's characteristic rhetorical shrewdness. For he faces a tremendous strategic problem: how to refute the prevalent romantic view of Plath and of her manic confessionalism without seeming insensitive or self-aggrandizing. Wilbur resolves the problem beautifully. Having disparaged himself for his own purported stupidity and for the slightness of his conversation (thus allowing us to see that he doesn't share Plath's notorious egocentrism), and having appeared, in his use of such words as *immensely* and *large*, almost to echo the admirers of Plath who would magnify her art by citing the magnitude of psychological difficulties, he deftly, and in thoroughly un-Plathlike fashion, steps offstage and proceeds to contrast Plath not with himself but—surprise!—with their elderly, unrenowned hostess:

> And Edna Ward shall die in fifteen years,
> After her eight-and-eighty summers of
> Such grace and courage as permit no tears,
> The thin hand reaching out, the last word *love*,
>
> Outliving Sylvia who, condemned to die,
> Shall study for a decade, as she must,
> To state at last her brilliant negative
> In poems free and helpless and unjust.

"Grace," "courage," "love": these are among Wilbur's chief values, and by noting gently that Edna Ward exhibited all of them he reminds us that Plath, despite her brilliance, was not famous for exhibiting any of them. While Wilbur acknowledges that brilliance, and admits Plath's constitutional incapacity to employ it otherwise than in the way she did—that is, in poems whose form is "free" and substance "negative"—he nonetheless, in his poem's perfectly chosen last word, makes clear his conviction that her work is morally objectionable, not just because it wronged her loved ones but because it undervalues life. Implicit in Wilbur's tacit criticism of Plath's egoism and negativity, of course, is a reminder of how modest and affirmative his own poetry is. Yet the important thing is that this reminder *is* implicit; if "Cottage Street, 1953" makes its point effectively—and, to my mind, it most assuredly does—it is largely because Wilbur has the good sense to realize that his mother-in-law

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belongs in the poem and that references to the qualities of his own poetry do not. A reader who recalls Plath's famously fierce "Daddy," in which she equates her father with a Nazi, can only admire Wilbur's ability, in this poem, to submit a devastating indictment of Plath even as he maintains a seemingly compassionate tone toward her.

This poem's indulgence in personal recollection—and, especially, its naming of identifiable individuals other than the poet—makes it a rarity for Wilbur. Far more common, in his oeuvre, are poems of decorous, dexterous, and thoroughly detached observation. Wilbur has a wonderful gift for seeing familiar sights afresh. Consider his landscape description in "Winter Spring": "A script of trees before the hill / Spells cold, with laden serifs." Or his rendering of midday in "Sunlight Is Imagination": "Now swings / The sky to noon, and mysteries run / To cover." Or, from "Marginalia," this analogy of losing consciousness to plunging downward in an elevator: "Descending into sleep (as when the night-lift / Falls past a brilliant floor), we glimpse a sublime / Décor and hear, perhaps, a complete music."

Yet some sights in Wilbur's poetry become a bit *too* familiar; it is easy to imagine that a reader of the *New and Collected Poems*—especially of Wilbur's earlier poems—might come to lose his appetite for yet another poem about leaves, however dazzlingly conceived, or for yet another poem that elaborately personifies the wind and sea. Invariably, Wilbur's poems on such themes are carefully observed and brilliantly evocative; but when read one after the other, rather than encountered individually in magazines, they can become almost monotonous. Likewise, in such works as his verse definition of "Shame" ("a cramped little state with no foreign policy, / Save to be thought inoffensive . . ."), his meditations on such things as the ampersand ("perhaps a lyre / Or a clef wrung wry in tuning untunable tones, / Or a knot . . .") and the letter "O" ("The idle dayseye, the laborious wheel . . ."), his translations of ancient riddles, and his ballade composed in whimsical response to a fifteenth-century contest sponsored by the Duke of Orléans, Wilbur seems a bit too eager to impress the reader with his cleverness and virtuosity. Reading these poems, one does not long for more recklessness on Wilbur's part; but one does find oneself thinking that a major poet should be more urgent and passionate, more patently *inspired*, than this.

One wishes especially, when reading such poems, that they had more human beings in them. Even when people do crop up in Wilbur's verse, they often seem, in some way, to be subordinated to nature. The speaker in "Looking into History," for instance, tries to feel some sense of connection with five Civil War soldiers in a Matthew Brady photograph, but fails because their appearance is dated (they "[s]how but the postures men affected then / And the hermit faces of a finished year"); it is only when he recognizes some background trees as sycamores that the picture comes alive for him. "Superiorities," meanwhile, contends that men who brave an ocean storm on an open deck are "far superior" to those "[h]uddled below with wives and buddies, / Comforting, caring, sharing pills, / Prayers and other proper studies." And in the lovely poem "Boy at the Window," a boy weeps to see his snowman "standing all alone / In dusk and cold," while the snowman, wiser and stronger of spirit, weeps not for himself but "[f]or the child at the bright pane surrounded by / Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear." Reading these poems, one finds oneself troubled by the suspicion that the poet harbors a readier sympathy for the natural world than for humankind, and regards nature as purer, finer, somehow more authentic than man.

Too often, moreover, when Wilbur does write ostensibly intimate poems, he unsettles and disappoints by abandoning personal particulars in favor of grandiloquent rhetoric. In "Pardon," for example, the speaker remembers the death of his pet dog when he was ten years old, and one has the impression at first that Wilbur is genuinely purging a deep-seated, decades-old trauma. Yet the poem shifts abruptly from its unpretentiously rendered childhood anecdote to grown-up oratory: "I dreamt the past was never past redeeming: / But whether this was false or honest dreaming / I beg death's pardon now." Though beautifully accomplished, the poem ultimately seems less a sincere purgation than a calculated mining of the poet's past for material, a dredging up and manipulation of memory toward a premeditated conclusion. Randall Jarrell makes a similar observation about Wilbur's poem "Death of a Toad," com-

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menting that when one reads the description of the toad, whose leg has been severed by a power mower, one feels at first that the toad "is real, all right."

But when you read on, when Mr. Wilbur says that the toad "dies / Toward some deep monotone, / Toward misted and ebullient seas / And cooling shores, toward lost Amphibia's emperies," you think with a surge of irritation and dismay, "So it was all only an excuse for some poetry."

Considerably more admirable are those poems in which Wilbur puts his faculties at the service of a recognizable human emotion or idea. "Potato," for instance, opens with several strong lines of description: "Cut open raw, it looses a cool clean stench, / Mineral acid seeping from pores of prest meal; / It is like breathing a strangely refreshing tomb." Yet Wilbur goes beyond this description to observe how the potato—"simple as soil," "blind and a common brown"—meant for many, in wartime, the difference between life and death: " 'It was potatoes saved us, they kept us alive.' / Then they had something to say akin to praise / For the mean earth-apples, too common to cherish or steal." In the end, then, "Potato" is not merely an exercise in description but a poignant meditation upon the fact that something as plain and disesteemed as a potato could, in the time of adversity, save people's lives and come to be treasured. In similar fashion, "First Snow in Alsace" begins by describing a snowfall: "The snow came down last night like moths / Burned on the moon." Yet the poem, set at an army post, is not simply about snow but about how snow can conceal the scars of combat, prompt moments of human communion ("the new air white and fine" causing people to "[t]rade glances quick with shared surprise"), and, for a time, restore even a soldier's childhood innocence: "The night guard coming from his post / Ten first-snows back in thought, walks slow / And warms him with a boyish boast: / He was the first to see the snow." In both "Potato" and "First Snow in Alsace," people who have been engaged in killing each other, destroying property, and blasting craters in fields are reminded of the restorative powers of even the homeliest natural phenomena.

I have cited these poems, both from *The Beautiful Changes*, because they are relatively uncomplicated early examples of Wilbur's ability to turn his descriptive talents to the production not just of competent landscape studies or still lives but of sensitive reflections on the moral and metaphysical dimensions of man's relation to the universe. A more substantial instance of this ability is the striking poem "Love Calls Us to the Things of this World" (the title is from Saint Augustine), wherein the speaker, awakening to see laundry fluttering on a clothesline outside his bedroom window and imagining that the bed sheets and blouses are inhabited by angels, "rising together in calm swells / Of halcyon feeling," finds himself momentarily shrinking from the thought of the day ahead. He thinks: "Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry, / Nothing but rosy hands in the rising steam / And clear dances done in the sight of heaven." Yet at the end of the poem he accepts life's imperfection, the soul having descended, so to speak, into his waking body and decreed that the clothes be brought down "from their ruddy gallows" and placed on "the backs of thieves": "Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone, / And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating / Of dark habits, / keeping their difficult balance."

Part of the strength of this poem derives from the freshness and seeming spontaneity of its conceit (no artful reworking of conventional images here), and part stems from the vigor of Wilbur's language, which is looser and simpler than in many of his poems. But the most important thing about the poem is the speaker's ultimate rejection of the impulse to spurn or subordinate the human. To be sure, the poem begins with an attraction, on the part of the speaker, to the idea of clothes that are immaculate and that will never be worn by people (an attraction that might, the reader reflects, be shared by the speaker of "Looking into History" or "Superiorities"); but the poem moves beyond this momentary enchantment to a desire for human contact and an awareness that, in order to live and love in the world, one must face the daily accretion of soil and stain, both literal and figurative, and must remain stable and stout-hearted in the face of madness, misfortune, and iniquity. The poem is exquisite, and one of its more remarkable qualities is the difficult balance that Wilbur manages to sustain between the temporal and the spiritual, between impetuousness and design, between a natu-

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ral-seeming expression of feeling, which never deviates into sentimentality, and an unaffected contemplativeness, which never strays into a confining, impersonal pseudo-intellectuality.

It might be said, then, that Wilbur's finest poems are those in which his extraordinary craft is animated by a touch of enthusiasm or awe in the presence of what Wilbur, in the title of his third collection, refers to as "the things of this world," and in which he addresses what he has called "the proper relation between the tangible world and the intuitions of the spirit." What is amazing about his poems is that, earthbound as they can seem when he is proffering a meticulous description of a tree or an eggplant, Wilbur is capable of raising such images to a Platonic plane with what appears to be the greatest of ease. He speaks in one poem of "the mystery of things that are," and this mystery is one with which his best work communicates a lively fascination. He realizes, too, that in order to keep alive one's appreciation of this mystery, it helps to get a new slant on the familiar. He underlines the importance of fresh perspectives in a winsome poem called "Digging for China," whose speaker remembers a childhood attempt to reach China—"a place where nothing was the same"—by digging a backyard hole. Naturally, he fails—and yet he succeeds as well, for, having finally grown tired of hanging upside down into the hole and "looking into darkness,"

> I stood up in a place I had forgotten,
> Blinking and staggering while the earth went round
> And showed me silver barns, the fields dozing
> In palls of brightness, patens growing and gone
> In the tides of leaves, and the whole sky china blue.
> Until I got my balance back again
> All that I saw was China, China, China.

An even lovelier poem, the sonnet "Praise in Summer" (written when Wilbur was in his twenties), likewise contemplates the need to turn the world upside down, as it were, in order to recognize its wonders:

> Obscurely yet most surely called to praise,
> As sometimes summer calls us all, I said
> The hills are heavens full of branching ways
> Where star-nosed moles fly overhead the dead;
> I said the trees are mines in air, I said
> See how the sparrow burrows in the sky!
> And then I wondered why this mad *instead*
> Perverts our praise to uncreation, why
> Such savor's in this wrenching things awry.
> Does sense so stale that it must needs derange
> The world to know it? To a praiseful eye
> Should it not be enough of fresh and strange
> That trees grow green, and moles can course in clay,
> And sparrows sweep the ceiling of our day?

The answer, of course, is that it *should* be enough that trees grow green and moles can course in clay, but it isn't. Human nature is such that what we marvel at one day, we take for granted the next. And this, to Wilbur's mind, is why we need poets: to wrench things awry for us a bit, to "derange" the world time and again so that we may know and marvel at it anew. And also so that we may join him in praise: for Wilbur is a Christian poet who finds holiness not only in the ordinary world but (as his respectful references to Edna Ward might suggest) in the life humbly and patiently lived, and in work steadily and conscientiously performed. "A Plain Song for Comadre" pays tribute to a woman who, "[f]or love and in all weathers," has for seventeen years "kept the church / Of San Ysidro," sweeping and scrubbing and polishing, "[a]nd seen no visions but the thing done right / From the clay porch / To the white altar." Yet sometimes "the early sun / Shines as she flings the scrubwater out, with a crash / Of grimy rainbows, and the stained suds flash / Like angel-feathers." If Wilbur's poems are so consistently well made, it is largely, one gathers, a consequence of his devotion to the ideal of honest, diligent labor represented by the woman in this poem. A corollary to this devotion is Wilbur's antipathy toward shoddy merchandise, the manufacture of which he characterizes as nothing less than a dishonorable act. In the poem "Junk," for instance, the speaker sees a badly made axe in his neighbor's ashcan, and pronounces it "hell's handiwork." "The heart winces / For junk and gimcrack," Wilbur writes, "for jerrybuilt things / And the men who make them / for a little money, / Bartering pride / like the bought boxer / Who pulls his punches, / or the paid-off jockey / Who in the home stretch / holds in his horse."

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Like many of Wilbur's poems, "Junk" can be read, of course, as a commentary upon the writing of poetry. One is reminded of Wallace Stevens, who continually wrote about poetry by writing about other things, and whose preoccupation with reality and imagination Wilbur shares. If Wilbur is a smaller figure than Stevens, it is partly because he puts his ample expertise at the service of a smaller vision, rejecting the temptation to write long, cerebral, coldly passionate poems in the manner of Stevens's "The Idea of Order at Key West"—in which one can practically feel the intellect groping its way, from insight to insight, toward a fuller understanding of itself and its context—and preferring instead to create less ambitious, smaller-scale lyrics that are impeccably shaped objects, rich in echo and epigram. Wilbur's attitude toward reality and imagination is, furthermore, different from that of Stevens. Convinced of the non-existence of God, Stevens envisions the poet as a substitute deity, a maker of supreme fictions; as he writes in "The Man with the Blue Guitar," "Poetry / Exceeding music must take the place / Of empty heaven and its hymns, / Ourselves in poetry must take their place." Many of Wilbur's poems, like Stevens's, make witty comparisons between divine and literary creation. But to Wilbur it is the deity who is the supreme maker; the poet, in his view, is a lesser creator, charged with the task of awakening his readers' appreciation of the world in which they find themselves, reminding them of the need to live with the sometimes dispiriting facts of life while never losing sight of its rewards. If Stevens, at his strongest and most characteristic, is grandly remote and oracular, Wilbur, for all his commanding wit, radiates, at his best, a quietly appealing humility. Yet his most exceptional poems are enriching in a way that is very rare in our time; surely there are few living American poets whom one would place before him.

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CONTROVERSY

Multiculturalism: An Exchange

MOLEFI KETE ASANTE

We are all implicated in the positions we hold about society, culture, and education. Although the implications may take quite different forms in some fields and with some scholars, such as the consequences and our methods and inquiry on our systems of values, we are nevertheless captives of the positions we take, that is, if we take those positions honestly.

In a recent article in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR (Summer 1990), Diane Ravitch reveals the tensions between scholarship and ideological perspectives in an exceedingly clear manner. The position taken in her article "Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures" accurately demonstrates the thesis that those of us who write are implicated in what we choose to write. This is not a profound announcement since most fields of inquiry recognize that a researcher's presence must be accounted for in research or a historian's relationship to data must be examined in seeking to establish the validity of conclusions. This is not to say that the judgment will be invalid because of the intimacy of the scholar with the information but rather that in accounting for the scholar's or researcher's presence we are likely to know better how to assess the information presented. Just as a researcher may be considered an intrusive presence in an experiment, the biases of a scholar may be just as intrusive in interpreting data or making analysis. The fact that a writer seeks to establish a persona of a non-interested observer means that such a writer wants the reader to assume that an unbiased position is being taken on a subject. However, we know that as soon as a writer states a proposition, the writer is implicated and such implication holds minor or extreme consequences.

The remarkable advantage of stating aims and objectives prior to delivering an argument is that the reader knows precisely to what the author is driving. Unfortunately, too many writers on education either do not know the point they are making or lose sight of their point in the making. Such regrettably is the case with Diane Ravitch's article on multicultural education.

Among writers who have written on educational matters in the last few years, Professor Ravitch of Columbia University's Teacher's College is considered highly quotable and therefore, in the context of American educational policy, influential. This is precisely why her views on multiculturalism must not remain unchallenged. Many of the positions taken by Professor Ravitch are similar to the positions taken against the Freedmen's Bureau's establishment of black schools in the South during the 1860s. Then, the white conservative education policymakers felt that it was necessary to control the content of education so that the recently freed Africans would not become self-assured. An analysis of Ravitch's arguments will reveal what Martin Bernal calls in *Black Athena* "the neo-Aryan" model of history. Her version of multiculturalism is not multiculturalism at all, but rather a new form of Eurocentric hegemonism.

People tend to do the best they can with the information at their disposal. The problem in most cases where intellectual distortions arise is ignorance rather than malice. Unlike in the political arena where oratory goes a long way, in education, sooner or later the truth must come out. The proof of the theory is in the

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practice. What we have seen in the past twenty-five years is the gradual dismantling of the educational kingdom built to accompany the era of white supremacy. What is being contested is the speed of its dismantling. In many ways, the South African regime is a good parallel to what is going on in American education. No longer can the structure of knowledge which supported white hegemony be defended; whites must take their place, not above or below, but alongside the rest of humanity. This is a significantly different reality than we have experienced in American education and there are several reasons for this turn of events.

The first reason is the accelerating explosion in the world of knowledge about cultures, histories, and events seldom mentioned in American education. Names of individuals and their achievements, views of historiography and alternatives to European perspectives have proliferated due to international interaction, trade, and computer technology. People from other cultures, particularly non-Western people, have added new elements into the educational equation. A second reason is the rather recent intellectual liberation of large numbers of African-descended scholars. While there have always been African scholars in every era, the European hegemony, since the 1480s, in knowledge about the world, including Africa, was fairly complete. The domination of information, the naming of things, the propagation of concepts, and the dissemination of interpretations were, and still are in most cases in the West, a Eurocentric hegemony. During the twentieth century, African scholars led by W. E. B. DuBois began to break from the intellectual shackles of Europe and make independent inquiries into history, science, origins, and Europe itself. For the first time in five hundred years, a cadre of scholars, trained in the West, but largely liberated from the hegemonic European thinking began to expose numerous distortions, often elevated to "truth" in the works of Eurocentric authors. A third reason for the current assault on the misinformation spread by white hegemonic thinkers is the conceptual inadequacy of simply valorizing Europe. Few whites have ever examined their culture critically. Those who have done so have often been severely criticized by their peers: the cases of Sidney Willhelm, Joe Feagin, Michael Bradley, and Basil Davidson are well known.

As part of the Eurocentric tradition, there seems to be silence on questions of hegemony, that is, the inability to admit the mutual conspiracy between race doctrine and educational doctrine in America. Professor Ravitch and others would maintain the facade of reasonableness even in the face of arguments demonstrating the irrationality of both white supremacist ideas on race and white hegemonic ideas in education. They are corollary and both are untenable on genetic and intellectual grounds.

Eurocentric Hegemonism

Let us examine the argument of the defenders of the Eurocentric hegemony in education more closely. The status quo always finds its best defense in territoriality. Thus, it is one of the first weapons used by the defenders of the white hegemonic education. Soon after my book *The Afrocentric Idea* was published, I was interviewed on "The Today Show" along with Herb London, the New York University professor/politician who is one of the founders of the National Association of Professors. When I suggested the possibility of schools weaving information about other cultures into the fabric of the teaching-learning process, Professor London interrupted that "there is not enough *time* in the school year for what Asante wants." Of course there is, if there is enough for the Eurocentric information, there is enough time for cultural information from other groups. Professor Ravitch uses the same argument. Her strategy is to cast serious examinations of the curriculum as pressure groups, much like creationists in biology. Of course, the issue is neither irrational nor sensational; it is pre-eminently a question of racial dominance, the maintenance of which, in any form, I oppose. On the contrary, the status quo defenders, like the South African Boers, believe that it is possible to defend what is fundamentally anti-intellectual and immoral: the dominance and hegemony of the Eurocentric view of reality on a multicultural society. There is space for Eurocentrism in a multicultural enterprise so long as it does not parade as universal. No one wants to banish the Eurocentric view. It is a valid view of reality where it does not force its way. Afrocentricity does not seek to replace Eurocentricity in its arrogant disregard for other cultures.

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The Principal Contradictions

A considerable number of white educators and some blacks have paraded in single file and sometimes in concert to take aim at multiculturalism. In her article Professor Ravitch attempts to defend the indefensible. Believing, I suspect, that the best defense of the status quo is to attack, she attacks diversity, and those that support it, with gusto, painting straw fellows along the way. Her claim to support multiculturalism is revealed to be nothing more than an attempt to apologize for white cultural supremacy in the curriculum by using the same logic as white racial supremacists used in trying to defend white racism in previous years. She assumes falsely that there is little to say about the rest of the world, particularly about Africa and African Americans. Indeed, she is willing to assert, as Herbert London has claimed, that the school systems do not have enough time to teach all that Afrocentrists believe ought to be taught. Nevertheless, she assumes that all that is not taught about the European experience is valid and necessary. There are some serious flaws in her line of reasoning. I shall attempt to locate the major flaws and ferret them out.

Lip service is paid to the evolution of American education from the days of racial segregation to the present when "new social historians" routinely incorporate the experiences of other than white males. Nowhere does Professor Ravitch demonstrate an appreciation for the role played by the African American community in overcoming the harshest elements of racial segregation in the educational system. Consequently, she is unable to understand that more fundamental than eliminating racial segregation has to be the removal of racist thinking, assumptions, symbols, and materials in the curriculum.

However, there is no indication that Professor Ravitch is willing to grant an audience to this reasoning because she plods deeper into the same quagmire by attempting to conceptualize multiculturalism, a simple concept in educational jargon. She posits a *pluralist* multiculturalism—a redundancy—then suggests a *particularistic* multiculturalism—an oxymoron—in order to beat a dead horse. The ideas are non-starters because they have no reality in fact. I wrote the first book in this country on trans-racial communication and edited the first handbook on intercultural communication, and I am unaware of the categories Professor Ravitch seeks to forge. She claims that the pluralist multiculturalist believes in pluralism and the particularistic multiculturalist believes in particularism. Well, multiculturalism in education is almost self-defining. It is simply the idea that the educational experience should reflect the diverse cultural heritage of our system of knowledge. I have contended that such is not the case and cannot be the case until teachers know more about the African American, Native American, Latino, and Asian experiences. This position obviously excites Professor Ravitch to the point that she feels obliged to make a case for "mainstream Americans."

The Myth of Mainstream

The idea of "mainstream American" is nothing more than an additional myth meant to maintain Eurocentric hegemony. When Professor Ravitch speaks of mainstream, she does not have Spike Lee, Aretha Franklin, or John Coltrane in mind. Bluntly put, "mainstream" is a code word for "white." When a dean of a college says to a faculty member, as one recently said, "You ought to publish in mainstream journals," the dean is not meaning *Journal of Black Studies* or *Black Scholar*. As a participant in the racist system of education, the dean is merely carrying out the traditional function of enlarging the white hegemony over scholarship. Thus, when the status quo defenders use terms like "mainstream," they normally mean "white." In fact, one merely has to substitute the words "white controlled" to get at the real meaning behind the code.

Misunderstanding Multiculturalism

Misunderstanding the African American struggle for education in the United States, Professor Ravitch thinks that the call to multiculturalism is a matter of anecdotal references to outstanding individuals or descriptions of civil rights. But neither acknowledgment of achievements per se, nor descriptive accounts of the African experience adequately conveys the aims of the Afrocentric restructuring, as we shall see. From the establishment of widespread public education to the current emphasis on massaging the curriculum toward an organic and systemic recognition of

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cultural pluralism, the African American concept of nationhood has been always central. In terms of Afrocentricity, it is the same. We do not seek segments or modules in the classroom but rather the infusion of African American studies in every segment and in every module. The difference is between "incorporating the experiences" and "infusing the curriculum with an entirely new life." The real unity of the curriculum comes from infusion, not from including African Americans in what Ravitch would like to remain a white contextual hegemony she calls mainstream. No true mainstream can ever exist until there is knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of the role Africans have played in American history. One reason the issue is debated by white scholars such as Ravitch is because they do not believe there is substantial or significant African information to infuse. Thus, ignorance becomes the reason for the strenuous denials of space for the cultural infusion. If she knew or believed that it was possible to have missed something, she would not argue against it. What is at issue is her own educational background. Does she know classical Africa? Did she take courses in African American studies from qualified professors? Those who know do not question the importance of Afrocentric or Latino infusion into the educational process.

The Misuse of Self-Esteem

Professor Ravitch's main critique of the Afrocentric, Latinocentric, or Americentric (Native American) project is that it seeks to raise "self-esteem and self-respect" among Africans, Latinos, and Native Americans. It is important to understand that this is not only a self-serving argument, but a false argument. In the first place, I know of no Afrocentric curriculum planner—Asa Hilliard, Wade Nobles, Leonard Jeffries, Don McNeely being the principal ones—who insists that the primary aim is to raise self-esteem. The argument is a false lead to nowhere because the curriculum planners I am familiar with insist that the fundamental objective is to provide *accurate* information. A secondary effect of accuracy and truth might be the adjustment of attitudes by both black and white students. In several surveys of college students, research has demonstrated that new information changes attitudes in both African American and white students. Whites are not so apt to take a superior attitude when they are aware of the achievements of other cultures. They do not lose their self-esteem, they adjust their views. On the other hand, African Americans who are often as ignorant as whites about African achievements adjust their attitudes about themselves once they are exposed to new information. There is no great secret in this type of transformation. Ravitch, writing from the point of view of those whose cultural knowledge is reinforced every hour, not just in the curriculum, but in every media, smugly contends that she cannot see the value of self-esteem. Since truth and accuracy will yield by-products of attitude adjustments, the Afrocentrists have always argued for the accurate representation of information.

Afrocentricity does not seek an ethnocentric curriculum. Unfortunately, Diane Ravitch chose to ignore two books that explain my views on this subject, *The Afrocentric Idea* (1987) and *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (1990) and instead quotes from *Afrocentricity* (1980), which was not about education but about personal and social transformation. Had she read the later works she would have understood that Afrocentricity is not an ethnocentric view in two senses. In the first place, it does not valorize the African view while downgrading others. In this sense, it is unlike the Eurocentric view, which is an ethnocentric view because it valorizes itself and parades as universal. It becomes racist when the rules, customs, and/or authority of law or force dictate it as the proper view. This is what often happens in school curricula. In the second place, as to method, Afrocentricity is not a naive racial theory. It is a systematic approach to presenting the African as subject rather than object. Even Ravitch might be taught the Afrocentric Method!

American Culture

There is no common American culture as is claimed by the defenders of the status quo. There is a hegemonic culture to be sure, pushed as if it were a common culture. Perhaps Ravitch is confusing concepts here. There is a common American *society*, which is quite different from a common American culture. Certain cultural characteristics are shared by those within the society but the meaning of *multicultural* is "many cultures."

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To believe in multicultural education is to assume that there are many cultures. The reason Ravitch finds confusion is because the only way she can reconcile the "many cultures" is to insist on many "little" cultures under the hegemony of the "big" white culture. Thus, what she means by multiculturalism is precisely what I criticized in *The Afrocentric Idea,* the acceptance of other cultures within a Eurocentric framework.

In the end, the neat separation of pluralist multiculturalists and particularistic multiculturalists breaks down because it is a false, straw separation developed primarily for the sake of argument and not for clarity. The real division on the question of multiculturalism is between those who truly seek to maintain a Eurocentric hegemony over the curriculum and those who truly believe in cultural pluralism without hierarchy. Ravitch defends the former position.

Professor Ravitch's ideological position is implicated in her mis-reading of several scholars' works. When Professor John Stanfield writes that modes of social knowledge such as theology, science, and magic are different, not inferior or superior, Ravitch asks, "If Professor Stanfield broke his leg, would he go to a theologian, a doctor, or a magician?" clearly she does not understand the simple statement Stanfield is making. He is not writing about *uses* of knowledge, but about *ranking* of knowledge. To confuse the point by providing an answer for a question never raised is the key rhetorical strategy in Ravitch's case. Thus, she implies that because Professor George Ghevarughese Joseph argues that mathematics was developed in Egypt, Babylonia, Mesopotamia, and India long before it came to Europe, he seeks to replace modern math with "ancient ethnic mathematics." This is a deliberate misunderstanding of the professor's point: mathematics in its modern form owes debts to Africans and Asians.

Another attempt to befuddle issues is Ravitch's gratuitous comment that Koreans "do not study ancient mathematics" and yet they have high scores. There are probably several variables for the Koreans making the highest scores "in mathematics on international assessments." Surely one element would have to be the linkage of Korean traditions in mathematics to present mathematical problems. Koreans do not study European theorists prior to their own; indeed they are taught to honor and respect the ancestral mathematicians. This is true for Indians, Chinese, and Japanese. In African traditions, the *European* slave trade broke the linkage, and the work of scholars such as Ahmed Baba and Hypathia remains unknown to the African American and thus does not take its place in the family of world mathematics.

Before Professor Ravitch ends her assault on ethnic cultures, she fires a volley against the Haudenosaunee political system of Native Americans. As a New Yorker, she does not like the fact that the state's curriculum guide lists the Haudenosaunee Confederation as an inspiration for the United States Constitution alongside the Enlightenment. She says readers "might wonder what it is." Bluntly put, a proper education would acquaint students with the Haudenosaunee Confederation, and in that case Professor Ravitch's readers would know the Haudenosaunee as a part of the conceptual discussion that went into the development of the American political systems. Only a commitment to white hegemony would lead a writer to assume that whites could not obtain political ideas from others.

Finally, she raises a "controversy" that is no longer a controversy among reputable scholars: Who were the Egyptians? Most scholars accept a simple answer: They were Africans. The question of whether or not they were black was initially raised by Eurocentric scholars in the nineteenth century seeking to explain the testimony of the ancient Greeks, particularly Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, who said that Egyptians were "Black with woolly hair." White hegemonic studies that sought to maintain the false notion of white racial supremacy during the nineteenth century fabricated the idea of a European or an Asian Egyptian to deny Africa its classical past and to continue the Aryan myth. It is shocking to see Professor Ravitch raise this issue in the 1990s. It is neither a controversial issue nor should it be to those familiar with the evidence.

The debate over the curriculum is really over a vision of the future of the United States. Keepers of the status quo, such as Professor Ravitch, want to maintain a "white framework" for multiculturalism because they have no faith in cultural pluralism without hierarchy. A common culture does not exist, but this nation is on the path toward it. Granting all

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the difficulties we face in attaining this common culture, we are more likely to reach it when we allow the full participation of all ethnic groups in a quest for a usable curriculum. In the end, we will find that such a curriculum, like inspiration, will not come from this or that individual model but from integrity and accuracy.

DIANE RAVITCH

In responding to Professor Asante's critique of my article, "Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures," I had continually to reread what I had written, because I did not recognize my article from his description. His repeated allegations of racism and "neo-Aryanism" are not supported by quotations from the text, because nothing in my article validates his outrageous charges either directly or by inference. His statements associating my views with those who opposed the education of black children after the Civil War and with white South Africans are simply mud-slinging. He acknowledges in passing that my view of multiculturalism is shared by some black educators, but this anomaly does not cause him to pause in his scurrilous allegations of racism.

In the article, I described the major changes that have occurred in the school curriculum over the past generation. I stated that the teaching of American history had long ignored the historical experiences of minority groups and women, and that recent scholarship had made it possible, indeed necessary, to forge historical narratives that accurately represent the diverse nature of our society. The resulting effort to weave together the different strands of our historical experience, I argued, provides a more accurate portrait of the American people than the flawed historical account that it replaced. Children in school now learn, I wrote, "that cultural pluralism is one of the norms of a free society; that differences among groups are a national resource rather than a problem to be solved. Indeed, the unique feature of the United States is that its common culture has been formed by the interaction of its subsidiary cultures. It is a culture that has been influenced over time by immigrants, American Indians, Africans (slave and free) and by their descendants. American music, art, literature, language, food, clothing, sports, holidays, and customs all show the effects of the commingling of diverse cultures in one nation. Paradoxical though it may seem, the United States has a common culture that is multicultural."

I then went on to argue that demands for diversification of the curriculum had in some instances been pressed to the extremes of ethnocentrism; that some educators want not a portrait of the nation that shows how different groups have shaped our history, but immersion of children in the ancestral exploits of their own race or ethnic group. In trying to explain the bifurcation of the multicultural movement, I struggled to find the right nomenclature for the two competing strains of thought, and I used the terms *pluralistic* and *particularistic*. Professor Asante is right that I should not have called one of them "pluralistic multiculturalism" and the other "particularistic multiculturalism." While pluralism *is* multicultural, particularism is not. Pluralism and particularism are opposite in spirit and method. The demands for ethnocentrism associated with the Afrocentric movement should not be seen as an extreme form of multiculturalism, but as a *rejection* of multiculturalism. Afrocentrism and other kinds of ethnocentrism might better be described as racial fundamentalism. What has confused the matter is the fact that Afrocentrists present their program in public forums as "multicultural," in order to shield from public view their assertions of racial superiority and racial purity, which promote not the racial understanding that our society so desperately needs, but racial antagonism.

Professor Asante and others in the Afrocentric movement like Leonard Jeffries, Jr., Wade Nobles, and Asa Hilliard are inconsistent about whether Afrocentrism is for descendants of Africans only, or for everyone. Their literature sometimes claims that everyone—not only blacks—must learn that all the achievements of civilization originated in Africa; but at other times, Afrocentrists appear to endorse the idea that each racial group should study its own peculiar history (which I call "multiple -centrisms"). The former version of Afrocentrism veers toward racism, with its

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specious claims about the superiority of those whose skin is darkened by melanin and its attacks on whites as the "ice people." The latter, the "multiple -centrisms" approach, is in its way even more dangerous, because it is insidious. The "multiple -centrisms" position is superficially appealing, because on the surface it gives something to everyone: African Americans may be Afrocentric, Asian Americans may be Asiacentric, Native Americans may be Native Americentric, and Latinos may be Latinocentric, while those who are of European descent must be taught to feel guilt and shame for the alleged misdeeds of their ancestors. This "multiple -centrisms" model is now a hot educational trend, emanating from Portland, Oregon, where the local office of multicultural education has prepared Afrocentric curricular materials and plans to develop similar materials for Asian Americans, Latino Americans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders. This was also the organizing principle of Commissioner Thomas Sobol's "task force on minorities" in New York State, whose misnamed "Curriculum of Inclusion" called not for inclusion of minority cultures into a pluralistic mainstream but for "multiple -centrisms."

The "multiple -centrisms" approach is deeply flawed. It confuses race with culture, as though everyone with the same skin color has the same culture and history. It ignores the fact that within every major racial group, there are many different cultural groups, and within each major racial group, there exist serious ethnic and cultural tensions. Furthermore, the "multiple -centrisms" approach denies the *synchretistic* nature of all cultures and civilizations that mingle, and the multiple ways in which they change one another. Neither world history nor American history is the story of five racial groups; such a concept leads to false history and to racial stereotyping. This gross oversimplification of history and culture could be taken seriously only in a society where educators are themselves either intimidated or uneducated.

Professor Asante relentlessly argues against positions that I did not take and attributes to me things that I did not write. For example, Professor Asante quotes Herbert London of New York University to the effect that there is "not enough time in the school year" to teach black history and proceeds to say that I "use the same argument." He does not quote me because he cannot find support for his statement in my article. In fact, I do believe in the importance of teaching black history, drawing on the work of such respected scholars of African American history as John Hope Franklin, Eric Foner, Eugene Genovese, Gary Nash, Leon Litwack, Winthrop Jordan, and Nathan Huggins. It is not possible to teach the history of the United States accurately without teaching black history

Professor Asante willfully misconstrues a reference that I made to "mainstream Americans." The context was as follows: I wrote about how American history textbooks had for generations ignored race, ethnicity, and religion, and how "the main narrative paid little attention to minority groups and women. With the ethnic revival of the 1960s, this approach to the teaching of history came under fire, because the history of national leaders—virtually all of whom were white, Anglo-Saxon, and male—ignored the place in American history of those who were none of the above. The traditional history of elites had been complemented by an assimilationist view of American society, which presumed that everyone in the American melting pot would eventually lose or abandon those ethnic characteristics that distinguished them from mainstream Americans. The ethnic revival demonstrated that many groups did not want to be assimilated or melted." Professor Asante distorts this to claim that I felt "obliged to make a case for 'mainstream Americans.' " I nowhere made a case for the mainstream, nor did I describe who was included or excluded in this putative "mainstream." I wrote: "The pluralist approach to multiculturalism promotes a broader interpretation of the common American culture and seeks due recognition for the ways that the nation's many racial, ethnic, and cultural groups have transformed the national culture. The pluralists say, in effect, 'American culture belongs to us, all of us; the U.S. is us, and we remake it in every generation.' " By this description, Spike Lee and Aretha Franklin are very much part of the common culture and the American mainstream. So are Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Bill Cosby, Eddie Murphy, Oprah Winfrey, William Raspberry, Carl Lewis, Marion Barry, Malcolm X, Jackie Robinson, Leontyne Price, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Alice Walker, Martin Luther King, Jr., Frederick Douglass, Jesse Jackson,

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Henry Gates, Derrick Bell, Jr., and Kenneth B. Clark. As for publishing in "mainstream" journals, Professor Asante misunderstands the dean. She (or he) does not mean that one must publish in a *white* journal; she means that one gains credibility in the academic world by publishing in a journal that has clear standards of scholarship, where false charges of racism, character assassination, and out-of-context quotations are not permissible.

Professor Asante asserts that the ethnocentric curriculum does not claim to raise the self-esteem of students of the same racial or ethnic group. This is not correct. Professor Wade Nobles, whom he cites, runs a state-funded program in California called the HAWK Federation Youth Development and Training Program which aims to immerse young black males in African and African American culture; its purpose, according to the program's brochure, is to address "simultaneously the problems of substance abuse prevention [*sic*], gang violence, academic failure and low aspirations and poor self-esteem." The New York State task force report, "A Curriculum of Inclusion," whose chief consultant was Professor Leonard Jeffries, Jr., repeatedly asserts the relationship between the curriculum and the self-esteem of students. The report claims that a rewriting of the curriculum will promote "higher self-esteem and self-respect" among children from racial minorities "while children from European cultures will have a less arrogant perspective of being part of the group that has 'done it all.' "

After stating that the leaders of the Afrocentric movement do not rest their case on building self-esteem, but rather on truth, Professor Asante then claims that Korean students do well in mathematics because "they are taught to honor and respect the ancestral mathematicians. This is true for Indians, Chinese, and Japanese." Here is the full-blown ethnocentric premise: You can do well if you are taught that your ancestors did it before you. Professor Asante offers no evidence for his statements about Asian children, because none exists. According to Professor Harold Stevenson of the University of Michigan, who has conducted extensive cross-cultural studies of mathematics education in the United States, Japan, and China, children in Japan and China do not study "the ancestral mathematicians." They study mathematics; they learn to solve problems.

Of course, everyone needs to know that they, and people like them, are respected as equals in the society they live in. But to assume that self-esteem is built on reverence for one's ancestors is highly questionable. If this were true, the highest academic achievement in the Western world would be recorded by children of Greek and Italian ancestry, since they are the descendants of ancient Greece and Rome; but this is not the case either in the United States or in international assessments. In fact, according to a recent article in the *New York Times*, Italian-American students—the lineal descendants of Cicero and Julius Caesar—have the lowest achievement and the highest dropout rate of any white ethnic group in the New York City schools.

Nor is it clear that self-esteem (in the sense of feeling good about yourself) is a reliable indicator of academic achievement. In the most recent international assessment of mathematics, Korean children had the highest achievement and American children had the lowest achievement. When the students were asked whether they were good in mathematics, the Koreans had the lowest score, and the Americans had the highest score. In other words, the Americans had the highest self-esteem and the lowest achievement; the Koreans had the lowest self-esteem and the highest achievement. Why did Korean students fare so well? Consider the research report that accompanied the assessment results: "Korea's success can be partially attributed to the nation's and parents' strong interest in education, reflected in a 220-day school year. While there is virtually no adult illiteracy in the country, only 13 percent of Korea's parents have completed some post-secondary education. They nonetheless see education as the hope for their children and grandchildren. Everyone recognizes that Korea's job market is very demanding and the scientific and technological areas carry high prestige." Another contributing factor to Korean success is a national curriculum that is two-to-three years more advanced than the mathematics that American children study. Presumably, what Korean children learn is not that they are the greatest, but that those who care about them expect them to work hard and to study, and that if they do, they will succeed.

Professor Asante's appeal to the instructional power of ethnocentrism ignores the fact

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that Asian children in the United States outperform children of all other racial and ethnic groups in mathematics; the SAT mathematics scores of Asian students are far above those of other groups. Asian American children study mathematics in the same classrooms, using the same textbooks as their classmates; they do not study their "ancestral mathematicians." But, according to numerous studies, Asian children do more homework, take school more seriously, and study harder than children of other groups. The enormous success of Asian American students in American schools and universities suggests that their hard work pays off in academic achievement.

One of Professor Asante's most remarkable statements is: "Few whites have ever examined their culture critically." As I survey my own bookshelf, I see the works of scores of critics of American culture, of European culture, and of white racism. I see books by John Dewey, Gunnar Myrdal, and Karl Marx, among many others; I see the works of feminists, liberals, conservatives, radicals, Marxists, and other critics. Professor Asante is under the misapprehension that everything written about Europe or the United States by white scholars is celebratory, perhaps because he believes that every writer is irredeemably ethnocentric.

The purpose of historical study is not to glorify one's ancestors, nor anyone else's ancestors, but to understand what happened in the past and to see events in all their complexity. The fascination of historical study is that what we know about the past changes as scholars present new interpretations supported by evidence. The problem with the ethnocentric approach is that it proposes to teach children the greatness of their ancestors, based on claims that have not been validated by reputable scholars. So, in the Afrocentric curriculum, children are taught that the ancient Egyptians were responsible for the origins of mathematics, science, philosophy, religion, art, architecture, and medicine. No other civilization made any noteworthy contribution to any field, though all learned at the feet of the ancient Egyptians. The ancient Egyptians are shown as the most perfect civilization in all history. They did not enslave the Hebrews; indeed, unlike other ancient civilizations, they held no slaves at all. They were unrelated to today's Arab population, which allegedly did not arrive in Egypt until the seventh or eighth century. Such assertions ought to be reviewed by qualified, reputable scholars before they are taught in compulsory public schools. Nor is the relationship of African American children to the ancient Egyptians altogether clear, since the Africans who were brought in chains to the Western hemisphere were not from Egypt, but from West Africa.

The issue here is not the color of the ancient Egyptians; nor is it a matter of debate that Egypt is on the African continent or that it was a great civilization. What does matter is the claim that a single ancient civilization was responsible for every significant advance in the history of humankind. No civilization can claim credit for every idea, discovery, and forward movement in the history of humankind. Every great civilization grows by exchanging ideas, art, and technology with other civilizations.

Professor Asante is generously willing to permit "Eurocentrism" to survive "so long as it does not parade as universal." But there are elements in every civilization that have universal resonance, and every serious study of world history demonstrates the movement of ideas, art, and technology across national boundaries and across oceans and continents. Those ideas, those artistic achievements, and those technological advances that are most successful do become truly universal. Aspects of American popular culture, some amalgam of jeans, Coca-Cola, jazz and rock, has become part of the universal culture, as mediated by television and Hollywood. It is not only the West that has produced ideas, art, and technology that are universal; the educated person learns about universal features in all great civilizations. Picasso and other great modern artists freely acknowledged their debt to African art. Whether one is in Tokyo, Paris, Buenos Aires, New York, or any other great cosmopolitan center, the multiple influences of Europe, Asia, Africa, the United States, and Latin America are everywhere apparent.

This is why, for example, in California, the recently adopted history curriculum for the state requires all children to study three years of world history. All children will learn about the art, ideas, religions, and culture of the world's great civilizations. For the first time in American history, American public school children will study not only ancient Greece and Rome, but also the African kingdoms of

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Mali and Ghana, the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas, and the ancient civilizations of China and India.

But they also study those elements of the Western democratic ideology that have become universal over time and that provide a standard for human rights activists on every continent today. This is not just a political system based on the consent of the governed (a revolutionary concept in world history), but a philosophy that promotes the ideas of individualism, choice, personal responsibility, the pursuit of happiness, and belief in progress. In the spring of 1989, Chinese students in Tiananmen Square carried signs that quoted Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson. In the fall of 1989, Czechoslovakian students sang "We shall overcome" and quoted Martin Luther King, Jr. In the fall of 1990, Gibson Kamau Kuria, a Kenyan human rights lawyer and dissident, went into exile in the United States. Kamau Kuria resisted the undemocratic actions of the Kenyan government and appealed to the democratic standards contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Some of Professor Asante's complaints about Eurocentrism in the United States are built upon legitimate grievances against the racism that excluded knowledge of black history and achievements from the curriculum of schools and universities for most of our nation's history. I, too, would banish the Eurocentrism found in the textbooks of earlier generations, because their monocultural perspective led to wild inaccuracies and pervasive bias. If, however, Asante's scorn for Eurocentrism is a reflexive aversion to everything European or white, then his own view leads to wild inaccuracies and pervasive bias. Europe has a unique place in the history of the United States for a variety of reasons. Europe is significant for Americans because our governmental institutions were created by men of British descent who had been educated in the ideas of the European Enlightenment; they argued their ideas extensively in print, so the sources of their beliefs are not a secret. Europe is important, too, because the language that most Americans speak is English, and throughout American history, there have been close cultural, commercial, and political ties with European nations. And, not least, Europe is important to America as the source of seminal political ideas, including democracy, socialism, capitalism, and Marxism.

Europe, of course, is not the whole story, not of the United States and not of the world. We Americans—coming as we do from every part of the globe—have been significantly influenced, and continue to be influenced, by people who do not trace their origins to Europe. Our openness to ideas and people from all over the world makes our society dynamic. What is most exciting about American culture is that it is a blending of elements of Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Whether or not we have a melting pot, we do have a cultural mosaic or at the very least a multitextured tapestry of cultures. Whatever our differences, we are all Americans.

Behind this exchange between Professor Asante and me is a disagreement about the meaning of truth and how it is ascertained. The Afrocentrists alternately say that they want to teach the Truth, the lost, stolen, or hidden truths about the origins of all things; or they say that "truth" is defined by who is in power. Take your choice: either there is absolute Truth or all "truth" is a function of power. I make a different choice. I reject the absolute truths of the fundamentalists, and I reject the relativistic idea that truth depends on power alone. I claim that what we know must be constantly tested, challenged, and reexamined, and that decisions about knowledge must be based on evidence and subject to revision. Reason and intelligence, not skin color and emotion, must be the ultimate arbiters of disputes over fact.

Professor Asante suggests that we disagree about our vision of the future of the United States. He is right. I fear that Afrocentrism intends to replace the discredited white supremacy of the past with an equally disreputable theory of African supremacy. The theory of white supremacy was wrong and socially disastrous; so is the theory of black supremacy. I fear that the theory of "multiple -centrisms" will promote social fragmentation and ethnocentrism, rather than racial understanding and amity. I think we will all lose if we jettison the notion of the common good and learn to identify only with those people who look just like ourselves. The ethnocentrists believe that children should learn to "think with their blood," as the saying goes. This is the way to unending racial antagonism, as well as disintegration of the sense of mutuality on which social progress depends.

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Onward and Inward

EUGEN WEBER

A HISTORY OF PRIVATE LIFE. *General editors, Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby. Translated by Michael Goldhammer. Harvard University Press. $39.50 each.*

Volume 1: FROM PAGAN ROME TO BYZANTIUM. *Edited by Paul Veyne.*
Volume 2: REVELATIONS OF THE MEDIEVAL WORLD. *Edited by Georges Duby.*
Volume 3: PASSIONS OF THE RENAISSANCE. *Edited by Roger Chartier.*
Volume 4: FROM THE FIRES OF THE REVOLUTION TO THE GREAT WAR. *Edited by Michelle Perrot.*

"If (touch wood) you have a child, let it live if it is a boy. If a girl, expose it." That is a Greek writing to his wife in the century before the birth of Christ, and it illustrates how far we stand from attitudes and value systems to which we owe a great deal.

There is not much about Greeks in this handsome and hefty *History of Private Life* whose first volume runs from pagan Rome to Byzantium, by way of the Barbarians. But Greek philosophy and religion informed Rome, and Greek teachers taught the sons of Romans. Unsurprisingly, the Romans, too, abandoned children they did not want—to die, or be picked up and eventually used as slaves or prostitutes if they survived. The story of Hansel and Gretel reminds us that poor people in all times have abandoned children they could not feed. But in Rome, as in Greece, the practice reflects the broader extent of what we would consider private action, specifically, the rights of a father who held power of life and death over his family and household. A youth's father was his natural judge, who could privately sentence him to death. Even a married man could not sign a contract, draw up a will, or free a slave without his father's permission. You became truly a man and free only when orphaned or officially emancipated. No wonder parricide was a relatively common crime.

The question all this begs is: How far does crime, let alone its definition, belong to private life; to what extent, indeed, can a father's powers over family and household rest in the private sphere? The problem with privacy, of course, is how to define it. Law and custom regulate not merely social conduct, but private practice too. Abortion and infanticide are matters of private moment in some societies, of very public concern in others. The same is true about virginity, coupling, and contraception, let alone marriage. Successful defloration, a matter of public indifference in some societies, calls for publicity elsewhere. In this context, private is what public power or opinion permit. Are usury, homicide, suicide, or prices charged in the market for commodities private or public matters? That depends on local philosophy, conditions, or will. How private is morality? How public? And what about gestures and behavior? Urinating, defecating, largely private in contemporary Western circumstances, turn out to be public, even social, activities in other times and places. The attitudes that make them one or the other belong to the public sphere. So, often, do

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sentiments or, at least, their expression. How are we to know that what we feel is "love" or "shame" until it has been publicly identified and named? Or whether such sentiments are private or public matters? So, private is what public says it is.

How do "private" and "public" rub shoulders or interpenetrate? Clubs, fraternities, sororities, religious communities—none are independent of the public sphere. But what about the eighteenth- (and nineteenth-) century salon? Accepted as a private place that few attempt to regulate, the salon fosters activities that are at least partly public. Salons are copiously discussed in the third volume of this series, but one would like a bit more attention (indeed, even some attention) paid to the problems of definition, delimitation, and interpretation that they pose. But that sort of question, if begged in the title, is not tackled in the text.

The *Editions du Seuil*, which published the original *History of Private Life*, did so in the wake of similar, and similarly splendid, series that treated urban and rural France. But *urban* and *rural* are easier to define than *private* and *public*. This is a predicament the editors have circumvented by pretending to ignore that a serious problem exists. But a tacitly dismissive stance will not warn the reader just how equivocal the enterprise is, how hazy the scope of private living and doing, how puzzling the promise of the title. How, for example, should one regard private activities like silent reading, praying, weeping? Few gestures seem more personal than tears, yet plangency is both private *and* regulated by social expectations. In most societies (though not all) men are not supposed to sob, women are urged (or expected) to have a good cry. And if a cry may be good for you, it is often good for decorum too: witness the professional mourners paid for demonstrative weeping in many communities. Guy Thuillier, the path-breaking French historian who is cited exactly once in these vast volumes, has written about the rhetoric of tears. Rhetoric is as public an art as the grand opera that introduced us to *Una furtiva lacrima* as something hardly furtive. Group conventions and group pressures choreograph and calibrate public tears before they drive them out—into privacy.

Tears do not figure in these volumes' index, but the larger question will not easily go away. At which point does private slide into public in witness box, will, deposition, or diary—and how many diaries are private; how many are meant to be? At which point does public slide into private: is not imagination a private garden filled with borrowings from public places? What, in such circumstances, is conventional, expected, conditioned? How private is private? Wherever we turn, doubt arises about how private life might be defined and whether, once defined, it can be encompassed. Even that fine and private place, as Andrew Marvell calls the grave, is part of highly public exercises. The pomp and circumstances of death are hardly private.

So, now the reader has been warned. Undeterred by questions that they seldom raise, our authors grasp at the undefinable, like sharks at a bank of krill. Since fortune favors the intrepid, they bite off a lot to chew. Inevitably, the evidence they adduce is of the public sort; inevitably, much slips through their grasp. But such a lot remains that, having once complained, I find little else to complain about. This history of private life ranges from manners and everyday life to society, law, ideas, beliefs, and their material context. Most of the private life referred to is household life. Most of the evidence for knowledge or speculation comes from the upper classes, not the almost invisible masses—and even that is patchy. However limited, though, the information provides non-specialist readers with insights into distant and less-distant worlds, and with food for relativism. Every one of these volumes is filled with fascinating lore. And, if your interest flags, the best thing to do is just read on.

Witness the first volume. Ancient cities were never white, but stridently painted. The Pont du Gard, for example, was painted red. Columns of temples and other public buildings shone yellow and white, their capitals red, white, and blue. In private houses, the rooms were riots of color. Garb and living context were so often drab that brilliant color and contrast were highly appreciated.

The poor lived in tenements, probably sordid, certainly lacking water and heat. Whilst aqueducts supplied water for public fountains and baths, Roman houses had no running water, no chimneys, no fireplaces. There were braziers, of course, but rich and poor wore overcoats indoors and went to bed fully

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The 1990 Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards

The Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science

WONDERFUL LIFE: THE BURGESS SHALE AND THE NATURE OF HISTORY. *Stephen Jay Gould. Norton. $19.95.*

Citation: In his book *Wonderful Life*, Stephen Jay Gould combines a fascinating description of the history of an important paleontological discovery, that of the Burgess Shale, with a searching analysis of the nature of biological history and of the extent to which the evolution of organisms is accidental or preordained. In the course of the book, Gould discusses the attempts by the American Charles Wolcott—discoverer of the Burgess Shale fossils—to fit the fossils into a framework in which they closely resemble existing creatures. That conclusion was accepted for many years. Gould then describes the more recent work by several British scientists that corrected that view. The present view is that when the Burgess Shale organisms flourished, some half a billion years ago, there were many organisms that seemed at least as fit as those from which present life is descended, but whose lines have become extinct. Gould goes on to muse about the ability of scientists ever to account for the precise ways in which life has developed. He is able to do this in a work of clear and graceful prose, whose argument is accessible to readers with little or no background in the study of paleontology.

The Christian Gauss Award

EMERSON: THE ROOTS OF PROPHECY. *Evelyn Barish. Princeton University Press. $29.95.*

Citation: Evelyn Barish's *Emerson: The Roots of Prophecy* is a major achievement. Professor Barish has drawn on a great deal of new material, using the insights of modern psychology and blending the whole with her own perception of Emerson's personality and a complete knowledge of his writing. She has been able to give us a Young Man Emerson largely absent from previous accounts, and she has closely studied his childhood in relation to the practices of child rearing in families such as his. Intimate and significant personal aspects of the physical man—like Emerson's attitude toward food, his illness and eye trouble—are brought into view along with a closer look at the record of his psychological emergence into a young manhood troubled by obsession with death and sexual uncertainty. She contributes to our understanding of Emerson's mental development by astute discussion of the impact of David Hume's skepticism and by analysis of Emerson's youthful writing, his journals, and letters. How Emerson became himself, ready to write *Nature* and all that came after, is at last made visible. Finally, not the least of Professor Barish's achievements is the grace and vigor of her own exposition of this story, told so that it speaks vividly and easily to the non-specialist reader as well as to the most informed scholar.

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Award

AMERICA'S ROME: Volume 1, CLASSICAL ROME; Volume 2, CATHOLIC AND CONTEMPORARY ROME. *William L. Vance. Yale University Press. $30 each.*

Citation: William Vance's two-volume *America's Rome* is a scholarly tour de force, effectively combining art criticism, literary analysis, and intellectual history. As a definitive and comprehensive account of what Rome has meant to Americans, it will take its place among the great achievements of American Studies. Vance's ultimate goal was not to narrate who went where and how they liked it, but to examine what they created, wrote, painted, or carved, *and why*. For those who visit art museums, *America's Rome* will make large numbers of hitherto uninteresting pictures and statues highly engaging. For the serious reader of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, George Santayana, Ezra Pound, and many other major writers, literary strategies and complex juxtapositions that previously seemed inconsequential or opaque will suddenly acquire intriguing importance.

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clothed. Latrines were communal, those used by men larger and grander than those for women. The grand marble latrines one can admire at Ephesus must have been a center of male sociability but, surely, no more private than a locker room. Furniture was scarce: "A dwelling was above all an empty space," round which, in bigger homes, small rooms or cells opened, where one could read or sleep. Such spaces held a lot of folk. The vast homes of the rich were more densely occupied than the low-rent apartments of today. Servants and slaves kept their belongings in bags, and slept all over the house on cots that could be moved—even into the masters' bedrooms.

Rich and poor are, of course, relative terms. In our eyes, the vast majority of people in the Roman street would appear destitute—which may well have been the case. But those who called themselves, or were described as, poor were only the rich who were not very rich. Horace, the poet, made a virtue of his poverty: only two estates and appropriate houses. But the truly poor did not matter. Descriptions and distinctions refer to the visible few, above all to the great, around whom life gravitated and who, even when they had guests to dinner, served different wines and dishes to guests of different rank. Roman society, unequal in fact, was inegalitarian in principle.

Like so much of what went on in the home, eating was a public affair, the dining room a social theater. One can see how manners, hence attitudes, evolved from old regime to new by glancing at eating posture. For a long time only men reclined, while women sat at table. By the second century, when Apuleius wrote, women, too, reclined; and even slaves were allowed to stretch out while eating on holidays. Apuleius's marvelous donkey, also, eats the same dishes as the humans around him and learns to lean on his elbow as he does it, to recline like them.

But the better part of private life was spent in public establishments. Lacking a way to heat the home, city baths catered less to cleanliness than to warmth and sociability. Roman baths must have been rather like public beaches: places to mix with the crowd, meet people, show off. Eventually, baths evolved from functional edifice to dream palace, with painted decor, sculptures, mosaics, and sumptuous architecture. In the late empire, after the third century, an increasing hierarchy in social relations and a greater emphasis on personal modesty compartmentalized not only homes, but also once-communal activities. Large public baths were replaced by smaller ones, designed to respect modesty, and also by private baths in wealthy homes that made the rich more independent of communal life. New private latrines, some with a water flush, also reflected new pudicity, as well as new attention paid to bodily functions, sounds, and odors. Novel refinements, novel occasions for display.

The classic opportunities for conspicuous consumption were to be found in bread and circuses, spectacle and theatricalization. Shows of every kind made athletes, actors, racers, and gladiators into stars. Public games, especially, offered the opportunity to see people die; and this suggests another difference between our ways of thinking and those of our forebears. Greek and Roman imagery and literature are not sadistic. When Romans colonized barbarians, their first concern was to prohibit human sacrifice. But every culture is a tissue of contradictions, and human life was no more valued in itself than that of other animals. The spectacle of suffering was warranted if it enhanced public or private pleasure. With divertissement in short supply, the exhibition of violence and torment combined entertainment with edification. In Rome it taught manliness: *virtu*. Later, as in the Middle Ages, it would teach the wages of sin. Either way, few willingly missed a good execution. Small medieval towns turned out en masse to see the guilty hung, drowned, boiled in oil, or otherwise dispatched. Romans, who had other opportunities for blood(y) sport, were deprived of this particular treat: their public disorder seldom provided executions, because ordering and policing were largely left to private enterprise.

Contrary to later nostalgia, the Roman Empire was a chaotic place where anything was possible. Public life was ruled by the will of the governing class. But authority was more a matter of seizing the limelight than of obliging others to do one's bidding—let alone to obey the law, which then as now was more honored in the breach. There was, of course, no police. In the cities, gangs of well-born youths roamed the streets, beating passersby, manhandling women, smashing shops. The state itself was less like what we know and

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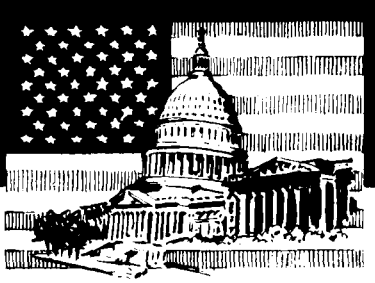

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more like the old Chinese or Turkish empires. Public office was about spoils, backsheesh the general rule. Every public function was a racket, every superior squeezed his subordinates, and all together exploited the populace. Officials paid themselves; so did the troops. Cicero, after a year as governor of a province, was making the equivalent of a million dollars a year and prided himself on his scrupulousness.

But the profits of public life had to be spent on personal display and noble living in public. Work was not a duty, but a demeaning need. Idleness, a virtue, was the cornerstone of private life. True men lived in leisure. Wealth was a virtue, because it permitted the noble life of idleness. Plato's citizens had been fed by rural toil and by other activities, like trade, carried out by people of no importance. For Aristotle, peasants, slaves, and shopkeepers could not lead truly happy lives, because freedom was freedom from labor, and poverty a kind of vice. Hellenistic (hence Roman) thinking on these questions merely elaborated methods of coming to terms with loss, or fear of loss, of such happiness. The aim of Epicureans and of Stoics was not to establish grounds for morality, but to provide a method of achieving tranquility, which was equated with happiness in a world where the foundations of noble living were becoming less secure. For hundreds of years, Greeks and Romans lived in the conviction that their society was decadent. As the property, the patrimony, of the great became more problematic, the blame was placed on faults of character. Man may be a creature of reason, but most men are mad. Spiritual flaws, weaknesses, appetites leave us vulnerable to the tempests of life. Whether they preached private discipline and public service with Zeno or, like Epicurus, preferred living on friendship and cold water, philosophers recommended contempt of death and vain desires. Suicide and eternal peace symbolized the ideal of private tranquillity.

While philosophers offered wisdom to free folk from anxiety, paganism, as it evolved after A.D. 100, began to prefigure the Christian model of relations to a consoling God. Religions of salvation offered deliverance from crisis and anxiety, reassured the faithful by organizing life in this world on the pretext of securing salvation in the next. As we know, Christianity tried harder and did better than the cults of Isis, Mithra, and others. At any rate, it triumphed on the political, public front. With success in the fourth century, private matters (like sexual mores, dress or lack of it, opinions concerning dogma) became public issues on which the clergy could speak or act. But, while hitherto private concerns came under new kinds of public pressure and control, ancient cities remained stridently profane, brutal, and sexually undisciplined. Actors and gladiators went on dying in theaters and circuses. Nude girls continued to splash in Constantinople's aqua shows, and a nude Venus guarded the public baths of Alexandria until removed by puritan Muslims in the seventh century. Meanwhile, under the very Christian emperor Justinian, a sixth-century governor of Edessa hedged his bets by worshiping an icon of Christ with Apollo painted on the back.

Christianity did not mean Christendom. First came the barbarians: tribes, gangs, without a state. Simple, brutal, joined together by private interest, they ate themselves sick, drank themselves into a stupor, and pillaged whomever they could. Where, in Roman practice, the private sphere had been largely public, the great fifth-century invasions meant that private interests swallowed public ones like an eclipse.

Necessity taught the survival of the fittest. Obsessed with survival, barbarians reduced the concept of man to the art of killing, that of woman to childbearing. Force was the only argument and, where force reigned, so did the young who were best equipped to wield it. Barbarian societies, dominated by youth, lived in the immediate present. Promises were easily broken, friendships easily repudiated, lying and perjury rife. Nothing enduring had time to endure. The authority of elders vanished with their power. Stylization, deliberate self-cultivation, civilization, which had flourished in a context of stability, disappeared. So did urbanity, an urban art. So did social structure: wealth and status became personal matters as private persons took over center stage.

For tribes living on the brink of survival, having was more important than being. Theft was punished by death, murder by fines. St.

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Ambrose called this avarice, Gregory of Tours denounced it as rapacity. But private goods were more important than life. For one thing they were more scarce. For another, men had no intrinsic value, only use value. And every loss was a personal insult calling for revenge. When burgeoning codes of law set out tariffs for injury, the more personal the injury, the more horrid or humiliating the penalty. The thief of a hunting dog, when caught, not only paid a fine but had to kiss the dog's behind in public. If caught stealing a falcon, the bird was allowed to devour five ounces of red meat straight from the culprit's chest.

Fines were paid, atonement made or denied, feuds and vendettas waged, not between individuals but between families. Cast off from family or clan, individuals became outlaws, bereft of all protection. In this anarchic, bloody environment, only the Church suggested that individual human beings were connected to something other than environment, family, or clan. Such suggestions took centuries to catch on, and did not do so without strange contortions. The Church, for instance, worked hard to establish monogamous, indissoluble marriage. Before this became general in the tenth century, clerical nagging often suggested that troublesome wives who couldn't easily be cast aside be butchered. Having slit his wife's throat, the husband would then pay the wife's family compensation for homicide. Historians know this as Carolingian divorce.

Yet, while slow, Christian influence on mentalities proved deep and broad. Affirming equality before God, the Church implied unwonted equality of status, even of the sexes. That was a liberation. Female saints, emancipated by asceticism, no longer had to bear children or support a husband. They were set free to travel as missionaries and pilgrims. Results were mixed. In the eighth century, St. Boniface reported that female pilgrims to Rome, Anglo-Saxons like himself, were forced to prostitute themselves in every town on the way before they reached their goal. Faced with this unusual means of mortifying the flesh, the Church was forced to forbid women to embark on pilgrimages. Still, the penalty for sin took no account of the sinner's social status. Christianity rejected the pagan notion that adultery pollutes the woman, not the man. Given the inclination to do away with wives, it declared wife-murder the most serious, hence most costly, kind of murder. Insistence on personal responsibility before God shifted primacy to being over having. Theft, in Christian law, was less severely punished than murder. Slave masters were no longer free to beat a slave to death, as they would be free to break a lance they owned. And, after the ninth century, murders committed with malice aforethought, like the premeditated vengeance of commonplace vendettas, were more severely punished than other kinds.

Christianity promoted self-examination. Conscience became a method for observing and analyzing inner spiritual conflict. The place to do this was the monastery, where St. Benedict's ideal, "work and pray," departed from the ancient ideal of cultivated leisure. *Otium* (leisure) was condemned, *Negotium* (work viewed as suffering) was praised. And, since monks prayed even as they ate, Cassian's fifth-century *Collations*, read aloud at monastery and convent suppers, provided the modern sense of "collation" as a light meal.

But the Church, though its influence stubbornly seeped and trickled, operated for centuries in surroundings that continued pagan and anarchic. Insofar as civilization is related to cities, the medieval was a rural age. The city once conceived as a stage for the exhibition of public power was invaded by the countryside; public power was appropriated by private individuals. What we call the feudal system would be based on private relations, ideally on friendship; and feudal pledges of mutual faith, service, and loyalty are strictly personal. Even medieval religion was personalized, with saints regarded as vassals of God and their Christian worshipers God's *arrière-vassals*. Men had declared themselves to be another man's vassal or serf to gain his protection. In Germany and Lorraine, many, even nobles, made themselves serfs of a saint.

All this, for long, remained a superficial veneer. The brutality of the feudal era wreaked havoc with private life and private relations. The ideal of friendship foundered on the rocks of reality: torture, mutilation, poisoning, betrayal. We know nothing about feudal women except what men tell us. But it is fair to think that knights were enjoined to

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defend widows and orphans because they were so likely to oppress them, just as they were required to be loyal because they were so prone to break their word. Meanwhile, an illustration from the thirteenth century *Roman de la Rose* depicts "the triumph of the couple" in a scene where the husband cudgels the wife he holds by the hair. Battered wives are of all ages. It is our revulsion at such violence—any violence—that is new.

Plunder and potlatch had been the principle of Roman greatness. They continued to be that of feudalism. Investment was alien to the medieval mind that prized not thrift but expansive generosity. Reserves squeezed from below were lavishly squandered on companions (literally those with whom one shares bread). True wealth consists in allies and friends.

Private, as we said, is that which is not public, not in the domain of all, but only of a few: the intimate, domestic. In Rome, domestic space had been largely open. In the Middle Ages, domestic space is circumscribed by walls, ideally by fortifications. The fortress confined knights, wives, children, crowded together cheek by jowl. Revealingly, the medieval dream house is light and airy, a thousand windows flood every recess with light. That's just what real houses never were. Constricted, smoky, dark, dirty, cold, comfortless, the shanties of the poor, like the dwellings of their betters, offered discomfort and promiscuity. Gradually this changed, mostly in towns and first in Italy, about which the second volume offers an enticing chapter. There, tower houses that could only be entered by climbing a ladder to the only door set high up the wall were abandoned after 1300 or so, though gates remained stout and locks forbidding. In the fourteenth century, windows began to sport some leaded glass, but light remained a precious boon and heating a luxury. By the end of the fifteenth century, we are told of fireplaces "in all the principal rooms of the great palaces." Beyond palaces, kitchens provided the only source of heat, though it is well to remember that kitchens remained rare in the homes of urban poor.

Comfortable furniture, too, tended to be an urban privilege. Farmsteads boasted few or no chairs, stools, basins, benches, dishes, lanterns. In town, there was more of everything: beds, chests (where clothes could be folded), lamps, dishes, linen. There were more rooms, too, and there were more servants (by 1552, domestics accounted for 17 percent of the Florentine population), who contributed their share of rancor and friction—with some reason. In Florence, in 1363, the money changer Lippo del Sega celebrated his seventieth birthday by raping his servant. One wonders where he found the privacy to do it.

Renaissance family life was lived among numerous children—their proliferation curbed by infanticide, generally by smothering. Surprisingly, there were numerous elders too: 9 or 10 percent were over the age of sixty-five. Greater contact and sometimes affection between generations must have spurred a sense of family continuity, of history, of self. In fifteenth-century Florence more than one taxpayer in three indicated a family name. Yet, just as the family defined itself more sharply, family solidarity began to give way. The vendetta fell into disuse, all Montagus no longer automatically fought all Capulets, individuals claimed freedom from implication in the crimes of kinsmen. Their feelings about closest kin were probably affected by another current practice, wet-nursing. Three out of four bourgeois youngsters spent their first few months away from home, well over half were not reclaimed for eighteen months or more, many for years on end. Object of enlightened wrath in the eighteenth century, wet-nursing, especially in the middle and working classes, would not wane until the twentieth century.

Bitterness, too, may spur self-consciousness and self-definition. Increasing material possibilities certainly did. More rooms, more keys, more independence. Privacy, first affirmed in the home, began to affirm itself within the home. Latrines appear in ordinary dwellings in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They represent better waste disposal, of course, but also renewed attention to intimate bodily functions. The *studiolo*, a tiny cell often without a window, materialized in Renaissance palaces as a private place in which to read or write, before it turned into the study. Even women, if sufficiently affluent, might enjoy a room of their own. St. Catherine of Siena, daughter of a dyer and twenty-fourth child in a family of twenty-five, enjoyed her own bed

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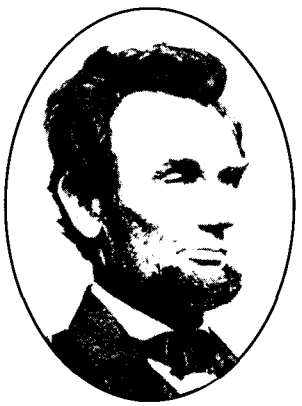

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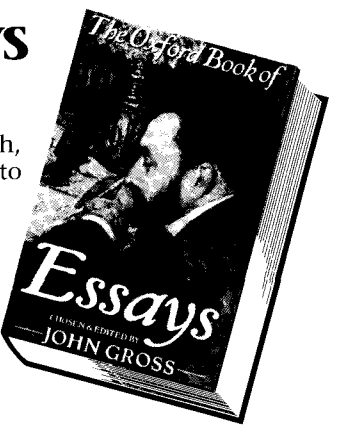

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by the age of fourteen and, soon thereafter, her own room.

Medieval culture was based on memorized knowledge and oral transmission. Thirteenth-century farmers and merchants relied on hearsay, even about their age or that of their children. Records would supplement memory, before they replaced it. Rolls, registers, accounts, and ledgers appear in Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and in German cities by the end of the fourteenth century. The shift from business books to private books, including family papers, would be small. Self-narration begins to weave in and out of domestic and public chronicles. By the 1400s, personalities emerge in writing as in art, no longer exceptional, but numerous enough to signify a trend. A new autobiographical literature represents individuals conscious of individual destiny, interested in the intimate as well as in the public self. In stone, in writing, or on canvas, the portrait, which vanished with Rome, revives to place the private self in the public eye. It is in the fifteenth century that images of kings, once idealized, begin to depict real persons. Other men and women follow suit. The late medieval world is awash in portraits—drapers, tax collectors, and mercenaries have themselves painted. The new realistic genre that depicts the sitter, warts and all, reflected pride in personal success, but also inner depth and personal evolution, as in Dürer's series of self-portraits, in one of which he looks remarkably like Christ. It would be Dürer, too, who in 1493 produced the first study of a nude model posing for a painter. In the year after Columbus discovered San Salvador, a German was exploring the equally exotic archipelago of self-consciousness.

The third volume covers the period that runs roughly from 1500 to 1800. The passions of the Renaissance (and, one may add, of the Reformation) to which the title of the third volume refers were going to cool in the rigors of the seventeenth century and the relaxations of the eighteenth. I would have preferred a reference to the rise of that middling sort of people who, during these centuries, became so visible and, increasingly, audible in the middle ground between court and common folk. That, really, is what the third volume is about: new people, new cultural acts between consenting adults—conversations, correspondence, reading. These are the private activities that dominate the period and open insights into intimate life.

Reading for the Romans had been reserved for that tiny elite which could afford the scrolls holding what they had themselves portrayed. In the Christian Middle Ages, the passage from scroll to codex, forerunner of our books, eased the way to solitary reading and also to reading with one hand and taking notes with the other. Printed books, when they appeared, evoked more doubt than praise. Printing, many claimed, debased knowledge by divulging it to the ignorant. Dissemination of knowledge, a mystery reserved for the elect, was tantamount to profanation. Highly imprudent too: Icarus and Prometheus had aspired to knowledge without limits and come to a bad end. But Icarus and Prometheus were the patron saints of the Age of Discovery. There was no holding them back after Reformation and Counter-Reformation turned into battles of books. Protestantism, like Judaism, was a religion of the book. More Protestants could read than Catholics, and far more Protestants than Catholics owned books; but even Catholics developed bilingual missals as instruments of private devotion. Silent prayer, silent reading, silent writing, too, but powerfully effective. Writing undermined old values associated with the spoken word relative to information, law, sentence, and command. Power, once physical and oral, was transferred to agencies based on writ. To participate in power, or to cope with it, literacy became essential. Was this as exploitative, repressive, and disciplinary as Foucault has claimed? It is well to remember that the advance of public power worked—also—to permit greater freedom for private subjects.

The authoritarian state specified the legitimate scope of authorities, personal and public; it lessened the need to obtain protection, and it limited the sway of communities rife with pressures and disorders. Law pushed out costly, oppressive rituals of derision, like the *charivaris* that punished nonconformity. Traditionally, village and neighborhood youth gangs harassed and insulted people, extorted money, damaged property, pilfered, and pillaged as of right. But victims of traditional disorders became more recalcitrant, readier to

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go to law, and the law was there to help them. French eighteenth-century courts tried thousands of cases of *charivaris*, nineteenth-century courts only hundreds. The law of the state could prove less oppressive than neighborhood misrule.

If the advance of the state, like Protestantism, spurred literacy, urban life advanced it even more. More city people read than country folk, more males (more of whom found need to read) could read than women. Education for girls (passionately debated since the fourteenth century) was education for girls of leading families. Though more girls learned to read through the centuries, and many to write well, too, the male literacy rate continued higher than the female, with the gap between the two as high as 30 percent. Generally, into the nineteenth century, more people read than wrote; and for many reading remained a communal activity. But the spread of reading as an intimate activity (and of writing, too, especially in the private diaries kept since the late 1500s) was a revolutionary departure. Reading attire developed, like the comfortable *liseuse*, reading furniture like armchairs and *chaises longues*. Reading, Sir Richard Steele wrote in the *Spectator*, "is to the mind what exercise is to the body." A very novel view.

It was the influence of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century courts that altered manners. But it was books that spread the change. The chivalric ideas of the Middle Ages turned into rules of conduct and of etiquette. Treatises, like the children's book that brought Erasmus more fame than his scholarship, inculcated common codes of social behavior. Other treatises on courtesy taught a rhetoric of gestures codified. Courtesy was about how to behave at court; but it spread outward in socially concentric circles. So did ideas about what was permissible in public without embarrassment or scandal: no spitting on carpets, no blowing the nose with one's fingers or in the tablecloth, no breaking wind, no words about the lower natural functions. Undomesticated aristocrats and commoners were housebroken. Table manners were imposed, then became more refined. Cutlery appeared, to be used along with or in place of fingers and of the knife all carried. The *gourmet* evolved from mere wine taster to connoisseur. The quest for taste led to the assertion of good taste.

As coarseness gave way to civility, intimacy, too, expanded. Sumptuousness turned into luxury. Distinction had been asserted in grand surroundings with rigid gestures; now it sought comfort and greater ease. Because too many people had learned the rules of civility, the elites invested in new signs of distinction. A code of manners was one convention among many designed to reinforce social status. In the eighteenth century, conventions that restrain behavior and falsify relations between people were declared bad. Simplicity and spontaneity were better. Breaking bread with one's own hand at table, instead of cutting it with a knife, was one aristocratic way of affecting simplicity. Suckling one's own babies was another. Some sixteenth-century physicians had begun to argue against swaddling, or trying to mold babies' heads, or using wet nurses. The late seventeenth century and the eighteenth witnessed a wholly new devotion to the child. Of course, greater interest in children did not affect all children. Fewer children were born, more children were abandoned, first to foundling hospitals, then to wet nurses and an early death. Annually, in late-eighteenth-century Paris, of twenty-one thousand such foundlings, twenty thousand were hauled off to wet nurses. That was one solution for the problems of deviance.

"Nothing is private in the lives of the great," St. Theresa of Avila declared. For those of lesser standing things were even worse. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century towns afforded no privacy, the poor still lived in inescapable promiscuity in rooms with flimsy walls and flimsier latches, in neighborhoods where (as ever) everyone watched everyone. No wonder that being alone, or alone with selected friends, came to be regarded as a distinctive luxury. Loneliness had been a terrible form of poverty, sought only by outlaws and ascetic hermits. Solitude had meant boredom, which all fled. By the end of the seventeenth century, a taste for solitude was developing: for a walk with a book among trees in a park, or heart-to-heart encounters with a special friend. To serve the new taste, more rooms (in houses that had more than one room) acquired specialized functions. Samuel Pepys's London house had a nursery, a living

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room, a bedroom for himself, another for his wife. Monumental fireplaces gave way to smaller more efficient ones in particular rooms. Garb reflected novel privacy, dressing gowns became fashionable among men, Pepys and Diderot, among others, had themselves painted in the new informal wear. And informality went further: eighteenth-century literature was flooded with confessions (and with pornography designed for private reading). Philosophy spoke more to the heart than to the mind. So did private, intimate forms of pietism. First-person novels became increasingly common. Epistolary novels offered the titillations of new-model voyeurism that would have been irrelevant in earlier ages when privacy had been more public.

In the forward march of privacy, intimacy, and self-consciousness that more or less began with the Middle Ages, the French Revolution looks like a hiccup during which privacy is equated with factional plotting, public symbols invade private space, and true equalitarians—in 1793 as in 1848—dream of putting all citizens in uniform. But, the Terror once over, the march of individualism resumes. It receives strong support from technological innovations and from social institutions that initiate the masses in what had been elite perceptions and activities. More, larger, cheaper mirrors, then photographs and photo portraits allow ordinary folk to perceive themselves, muse over their own features, recall those of others. First and last names, more generally used in schools, in the army, on letters and postcards, displayed on certificates and diplomas, initials embroidered on a trousseau or sewn on children's clothes at boarding school, affirm very specific aspects of the self. At mid-nineteenth century, epitaphs begin to personalize impersonal grave stones. In late nineteenth century, anthropometry personalizes criminal records, attempting to provide means of recognition unavailable in the day of Edmond Dantés, Count of Monte Cristo, or of Jean Valjean, let alone of Martin Guerre. After 1914, passports and significantly named *identity cards* begin to carry snapshots of the bearer.

Other aspects of daily life also change: heating, lighting, cleanliness private and public. Family identity is reinforced by family photos and photo albums, as by such new social and family rituals as the Christmas tree that spreads out of Germany after 1840. A major new bourgeois ritual would be vacations. The nineteenth century is when holy days turn into holidays: longer school vacations for school populations that by the century's end included all children, summer holidays, seaside holidays, Christmas holidays that become children's feasts, Sunday holidays imposed by the unexpected alliance of Church and labor, and Sundays in the country even for those who cannot afford anything more. Leisure is divorced from religious, agricultural, or industrial considerations: work time alternates with holiday time and even household activities adjust to new rhythms, as mealtimes conform to working hours.

Greater leisure, greater means, greater freedom from the yoke of necessity spur new sensibilities, new interest in "inessentials." The public takes an interest in the rights of children. The law recognizes the claims of those battered wives who begin to raise voices in complaint. House pets with names and collars accede to personhood. By the last third of the nineteenth century, animal rights appear as pressing as children's rights. Romantic sentiment and wider schooling define a new category: the adolescent. Gender becomes an issue once equality has been asserted, though not established, for mankind.

As promiscuity shifts from private to public places (the omnibus, declared Flaubert, had killed social distinctions), the French bourgeoisie begins to use an English word: *home*. Privacy, the editor Michelle Perrot insists, is an experience of the present age. Crowded and cozy, smelly, ill-heated, ill-plumbed, over-ornamented, the home becomes a new ideal, the family's newly walled-off castle. Soap operas in an age short of soap promote visions of ideally loving couples and domestic felicity. Secularized marriage becomes one more contract that can be broken by divorce. Many more entered no contract: in 1851, 12 percent of French women over the age of fifty had never married. Those who sought a career were the worst off. In 1880, 73 percent of French women postal employees lived alone, 55 percent had never married. In 1903, there were ninety-five practicing women doctors in France, but 15,000 registered prostitutes in Paris. The sexual revolution proved more dif-

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ficult than the social revolution. Men had rooms of their own—billiard room, smoking room, library, study; women did their work on the dining-room table. But they also made some gains: half of the women born after 1881 produced no more than two children. This may have something to do with the more favorable rates of life expectancy they would enjoy thereafter.

Family solidarity had been a yoke and a necessity, the family a lifeboat tossed on hazardous seas, however much hatred it evoked. As necessity waned, yokes became lighter, looser. Children were costly, old age became a problem, the sick a burden. Alleged unity and concord began to be replaced by public intervention: health insurance, retirement laws, old-age pensions. The fourth volume leaves readers on the threshold of our own age, the benchmarks of the present well established, the groundwork done for contemporary self-conceptions of individuals unconstrained by family, tradition, or moral authority in their pursuit of personal satisfactions.

No review, however copious, can do justice to four massive volumes, 2,678 pages in all, 2,553 of them of text and magnificent illustrations. Nor can even that many pages do justice to lives led by millions through two thousand years, let alone to all the questions one would like to ask. There is, for example, much about sex but curiously little about "love," and less still about money. There is nothing that I remember about that very private enterprise—sleep—a massive statistical fact, ignored for obvious reasons, yet not beyond material inquiry as Thuillier (once again) has demonstrated. How many people did their sleeping in a bed? (Shepherds, loggers, bargemen, charcoal burners, stable lads, and many domestics did not, well into the nineteenth century.) How many people shared a bed, and in what states of undress? (Few French wore nightshirts before 1914.) On what did they sleep (mattresses were rare in the French countryside before 1914, box mattresses were scarce even in the cities), and what kept them awake? (Cold gets little mention, or the need, commonplace into the twentieth century, to break the ice in the washbowl on getting up, assuming there was a washbowl.) There is nothing about the nineteenth-century appearance of sleeping potions, laudanum, or bromides, or about how insomniacs consoled themselves (prayers?) or each other (caresses?). Yet sources are not lacking. Nor is there anything about family secrets: maladies, suicide, mental illness, abnormalities that burden offspring with an embarrassing stigma and make it difficult to marry them off.

I know more now than I ever did about bathhouses, bogs, bedrooms, dining rooms, and table manners, but I still don't know how people kissed (for Ronsard, osculation was connected not with contact but with scent: it is the sweet breath rather than sweet lips he savored, perhaps because so much breath was sour), or, really, how people hurt. Did one society, culture, or age sob and another swallow its suffering? Is it true that some feel—or admit to feeling—pain less than others? Is private dying different from the public sort that Philippe Ariès and Michel Vovelle have told us about? How can one be so sure that "none I think do there embrace"?

So this splendid social history is necessarily incomplete. But what there is of it is more impressive than what one would imagine could have been. True, in a work produced largely by French scholars, the contents deal mostly with their land. There are chapters on Byzantium, England, and Italy, but the main emphasis stays on the Hexagon, and on Gaul before it. Yet even those not specifically interested in France can enjoy seeing the sort of work that historians are up to these days, and the way in which history proceeds: no linear development, no inexorable trends, but waxings and wanings, ups and downs. Spectacular changes are traced against unchanging backgrounds. Philippe Ariès remarks that from the central Middle Ages to the end of the seventeenth century there was no real change in people's fundamental attitudes. His statements hold for most into the nineteenth century.

A work that enrolls thirty-two contributors is bound to be uneven, sometimes repetitive, sometimes allusive, obscure, or simply silly. Was it really "fantasies of loss" that impelled nineteenth-century people to keep household accounts? Did urbanization truly multiply "man's narcissistic wounds"? But trendy excursions are few, talent omnipresent, good writing frequent, good reading the rule.

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Arthur Goldhammer, the translator, is at the top of his form. I noted a mere six mistranslations: nothing compared to the challenge set by thirty-two different personal styles. The pleasure one takes in reading this rich text should be his reward.

Literary Goggling

THE BRIDESHEAD GENERATION: EVELYN WAUGH AND HIS FRIENDS. *By Humphrey Carpenter. Houghton Mifflin. $27.95.*

Reviewed by DONALD GREENE

"No, they are not animals in a zoo, Mulcaster, to be *goggled* at. They are *artists*, my dear, very great artists, to be *revered*." Thus Anthony Blanche in *Brideshead Revisited*, explaining a famous jazz combo of the 1920s, the Blackbirds, to the moronic Viscount ("Boy") Mulcaster.

Humphrey Carpenter, who has published books about Tolkien, Auden, and Ezra Pound, is currently one of the most popular and successful gogglers, or, as they prefer to be known, literary biographers. Germaine Greer gave them the back of her hand in a talk reported on February 1, 1986, in the London *Times*. The virus, as she calls it, started with James Boswell. What lives in his *Life* of Johnson, she writes, "is not Johnson but Boswell's intestinal flora. . . . *The Vanity of Human Wishes* and *London* are worth all Boswell's scribbling together, but they remain unread. Boswell is easier to take." Likewise books recounting for the dozenth time the details of Byron's tom-catting "sell well, to people who have never read a line Byron wrote. *Don Juan*, the greatest comic poem in English, remains unread."

Some have seen it as inevitable, even desirable, that certain writers will live only as amusing figures in a literary biography, so that precious mental energy needn't be wasted on reading what they actually wrote. G. W. Bowersock, writing in the Winter 1988 AMERICAN SCHOLAR, believes that this is the case with Johnson: "Without his biographer Dr. Johnson would probably be remembered most of all for his dictionary, and that is certainly not a work frequently read today," whereas Gibbon "continues to be reprinted, read, and admired throughout the world." A reader of the *Washington Post* (October 1, 1989), replying to some negative remarks of mine in a review of the last (thirteenth) volume of Boswell's *Journals*, affirmed triumphantly, "Readers will turn first and finally to Boswell for the goods on Johnson." (Both happen to be mistaken. A recent count of the objects of study listed by the seven thousand members of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies shows Johnson easily first among the eighteenth-century English writers named; Boswell comes in ninth, and Gibbon a mediocre sixteenth.)

Will readers turn first and finally to the easier-to-take Mr. Carpenter for the goods on Evelyn Waugh? His book is essentially a mini-biography of Waugh, interspersed with snippets of biography of Brian Howard, Harold Acton, Anthony Powell, John Betjeman, Cyril Connolly, Graham Greene, and others. How many of these other than Waugh can be considered great artists to be revered? The nearest contender is no doubt Graham Greene, though Mr. Carpenter, fond as he is of retailing titillating gossip, does not give the reason usually whispered for Greene's not yet having been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

But the central figure remains Waugh. Anyone aware of the vast quantity of writing by Waugh recorded in the standard bibliography by Robert M. Davis, Paul A. Doyle, et al.—44 book-length works, 1,040 shorter pieces (and about him, 3,097 items)—will find nothing new in Carpenter's book, and, even if he has not read the whole of the immense collection, may conclude that Carpenter has read even less of it. The 473-page bibliography is not mentioned in the list of works consulted by Carpenter—a popular literary biographer can't assimilate such a mass of material in time to catch the lucrative Christmas publishing trade. To be sure, the book is a lively ramble through some of the best-known gossip about Waugh and his contemporaries. One

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of the notices quoted in the publisher's handout says that it is "a great read." On first thumbing through it, I thought I might go so far as to call it "a *good* read." But after perusing it more carefully, I became so irritated by the amount of misinformation and ineptness in it that I felt I had to withdraw even that perfunctory bit of praise.

Of course it is always a pleasure for an American reviewer to be able to point out solecisms in matters on which the British pride themselves on being the experts—for example, English grammar. I suppose one could in time get used to things like "the 'handful of homosexual curates' whom he declared constituted the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England." But I still haven't reconciled myself to what now seems the universal habit of British writers of treating *than* as a preposition taking the accusative case: "He [Acton] was older than him [Waugh]"; "[Lady Diana Cooper] was nine years older than him."

Then there is a little, or perhaps not so little, matter of British vernacular diction. Mr. Carpenter is rather fond of the verb "to bugger," using it in the title of one of his chapters, "Buggered About," to describe what the British armed services did to Waugh, and helpfully giving us a description in anatomical detail of the act of buggery. But when he substitutes it for blanks in the complaints of Cedric Lyne's troops in *Put Out More Flags*, "I'm ——ing ——ed with being ——ed about," he is way off the mark. Waugh well knew that "the single unvarying obscenity which punctuated all" the speech of the British army, "like a hiccup," as in

> "What did the ——— company commander want?"
> "He wanted to send me to a ——— O.C.T.U.," said Alastair.
> "Well, some ——— are ——— lucky. When are you off?"
> "I'm staying here."
> "Don't you want to be a ——— officer?"
> "Not ——— likely," said Alastair,

was not a six-letter but a four-letter word. Who ever heard a Briton (or American or Canadian or Australian) say "Not buggering likely"? A little naive of Mr. Carpenter.

And then (oh, dear) there are wild inaccuracies in the use of British titles of rank, something in which Waugh never makes a mistake. Some examples: "Lady Hester ('Star') Chetwode, a colonel's daughter." The daughter of a colonel, unless he also happens to be a duke, marquess, or earl, can never be "Lady Hester." "Lady Irene Ravensdale" never held such a title. Charles Ryder's wife is termed "née Mulcaster." We have no idea what she was "née"; the family name is never given. She had a brother with the courtesy title of "Viscount Mulcaster." But one might as well say that Lady Julia Mottram, née Flyte, was "née Brideshead" on the grounds that she had a brother with the courtesy title Lord Brideshead. Waugh did not "descend from a peer," Lord Cockburn. The addition to Cockburn's name, when he was appointed a Scottish judge, no more made him a peer than her appointment as First Lord of the Treasury made Mrs. Thatcher a peeress. Such matters are clearly explained in the annual volumes of *Whitaker's Almanack*, available in every British public library.

And what a mix-up we encounter with "Lady Horner, née Katharine Asquith"! Children of a Christian family are not born "Katharine"; their forenames are bestowed on them at the time of their baptism. The lady referred to was Mrs. Raymond Asquith, widow of Prime Minister H. H. Asquith's son and heir, who was killed in World War I. She was née Horner, daughter of Sir John Horner. Lady Horner was her mother. There is a photograph of both ladies, dear friends of Waugh, in David Pryce-Jones's *Evelyn Waugh and His World* (1973). There is no excuse for this kind of thing: the biographical data for Mrs. Asquith are correctly given in the appendixes to both Michael Davie's edition of Waugh's *Diaries* (1976) and Mark Amory's edition of his *Letters* (1980). A miscellany of other dubious statements would include such things as "Lady Sackfield"—this must have been Vita Sackville-West's formidable mother, Lady Sackville; Adam in *Vile Bodies* " 'drives straight to Henrietta Street' to see his publishers—who must therefore be Duckworth, the only firm at that address"; it was also the address of Chapman and Hall, managed by Waugh's father, which published this and all his other novels; Betjeman's short story "Lord Mount Prospect" (given in the index as "Mount Prosper") was "published in the *London Mercury* for December 1929 and

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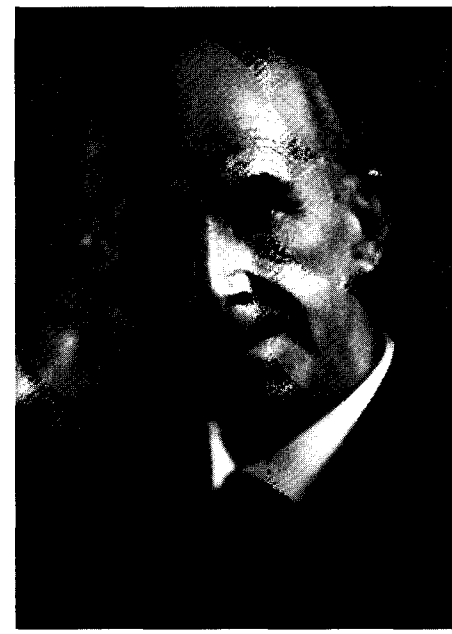

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never reprinted"; it has been reprinted at least twice, in collections published in 1934 and 1978; "G. B. Storm"—the novelist's name was G. B. Stern. But enough.

The mention of Mrs. Asquith may remind those more familiar with Waugh than Mr. Carpenter is that his one recorded outburst of political enthusiasm in his *Diaries* took place at the age of sixteen, when he eagerly followed the Paisley by-election, in which the former prime minister regained the seat in the House of Commons he had lost in the general election of 1918: "Asquith got in by a majority of three thousand. It is really awfully good news. Now there is someone to organize the opposition properly." (Alas, Asquith didn't.) It would be ironic to discover that Waugh was one of the last devoted adherents of the now moribund British Liberal Party, at least of its "legitimate" Asquithian wing. He wrote a scathing letter to the *Times* pillorying Asquith's supplanter Lloyd George, who late in his life accepted an earldom, having originally gained political fame by demagogic attacks on the House of Lords. Waugh knew perfectly well how little a British title may amount to, often no more than the "Honorable" cursorily bestowed on American state senators and municipal court judges. He makes fun of Nancy Mitford's own cherished "Honourable," derived from her grandfather, an industrious civil servant who was created Baron Redesdale in 1902, and of her admiration for Lloyd George and the ancient Barons Fortinbras, descended from sly Ned Fartingbrass, who picked up a lot of cheap real estate at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries. It has become customary to slot Waugh into the stereotype of "Tories," who are supposed to worship titles and ancestry. Certainly he was no Labourite. But neither was he an admirer of the so-called Conservatives, who did so little to conserve, declaiming against the "sham Augustanism" of that renegade Liberal Winston Churchill, once Lloyd George's henchman, and the political antics of his successors Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan. Perhaps—like Johnson—Waugh was a true democrat, an admirer of ability, wherever it came from, and a despiser of those who, like Mulcaster, use their titles as a substitute for it.

Isn't the title *The Brideshead Generation* a bit of a hoax? The action in the novel involves twenty years, from 1923 to around 1942; a lot of space, including France, Italy, Morocco, and different parts of the British Isles; and a large cast of widely varying ages and propensities. Which among these is supposed to be *the* "generation"? An earlier reviewer, quoted on the dustcover, writes, "It was Eton with its formative intimacies that acted as seedbed in the cultural movement that Carpenter documents." *What* cultural movement? And how much did Eton have to do with it? The book begins with a detailed account of a handful of Etonians, such as Brian Howard and Harold Acton, who formed a "Society of Arts," admiring, among other things, the art of Stravinsky and Picasso, which Waugh detested. Waugh did not attend Eton. Nor did Betjeman, Graham Greene, Osbert Lancaster, Alastair Graham, Richard Pares, Terence Greenidge, Peter Rodd, Christopher Sykes, Basil Murray, and Douglas Woodruff, whom Carpenter mentions as intimates of Waugh and influences on him—nor, for that matter, did Nancy Mitford and Lady Diana Cooper. No doubt Harold Acton's reciting *The Waste Land* through a megaphone at Oxford—if he did—might have encouraged Waugh's interest in Eliot; but, given Waugh's energetic rebellion against his father's Victorian literary tastes, it seems likely that he would have discovered Eliot anyway, if he had not already done so. When one adds later non-Etonian friends of Waugh—the Asquiths, the Plunket Greenes, such staunch Labourites as the Pakenhams and Donaldsons, many Roman Catholic clergy—it seems difficult to synthesize them into a "cultural movement."

Carpenter's contention that Waugh was obsessed all his life with a mystique about "country houses" seems pretty silly—for example, "Hetton [in *A Handful of Dust*] is the one thing that has proved permanent and indestructible. . . . For all of Tony's—and Waugh's—searches for it, the City, always there to be discovered by the true in heart, is none other than the English country house." Considering how readily Tony Last's forebears had destroyed the predecessor of Hetton, only forty years before Tony's birth, in compliance with a new fashion in architecture, it is hard to see why the current monstrosity should be thought any more permanent. Likewise King's Thursday, an almost uninhabitable Tudor wreck, vanishes over-

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night, to be replaced by a piece of Bauhaus concrete and glass, which in turn is soon to be replaced. Boot Magna, with its decrepit inhabitants, seems unlikely to endure much longer. As for Doubting Hall, its name gives it away. In fact, after Waugh, like many writers and artists, decided to live in the country when he could afford it, he often became bored with it, and looked for excuses for jaunts to London, if only to get a decent haircut at Trumper's.

Brideshead Castle, if, as seems likely, it is based on Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's Castle Howard, is a different matter. It is a great and permanent work of art, which cannot be made fun of as Waugh makes fun of the others. Besides, he admired the great historic London *town* houses, Grosvenor House, Londonderry House, Stafford House, which were torn down or converted into hotels or office buildings in the 1920s—and in the novels, Anchorage House and Pastmaster House, the latter "built in the reign of William and Mary . . . by universal consent the most beautiful building between Bond Street and Park Lane," which survived long enough to be blown out of existence in the blitz. Marchmain House, where as much of the action of the novel takes place as in Brideshead Castle, is clearly Devonshire House in Piccadilly, just across from the Ritz Hotel, where Charles and Cordelia walk to dinner after he has painted the fine interior. (It was torn down at the supposed time of the story and replaced by a large office building, complete with penthouse, which is still there.) That Waugh, a connoisseur of architecture, admired these buildings for their beauty and historical associations, not necessarily for the social status of those who inhabited them, seems beyond Carpenter's comprehension.

Brideshead Revisited is probably Waugh's poorest novel—and no doubt for that reason his most popular one and the most successful fodder for television. Waugh might not have disagreed: "I re-read *Brideshead* and was appalled," he wrote Graham Greene in 1950. It was a piece of self-indulgent nostalgia, a reaction from the dreary years of rationing and army life during the war, an excuse for sentimental escape to what he recalled as the happier days of the past. But Mr. Carpenter's explication of it is so absurd as to make one's hair stand on end. Its plot turns out to be Charles Ryder's carefully calculated attempt to gain ownership of the Brideshead estate—like Waugh, he had suffered an underprivileged childhood—ingratiating himself first with Sebastian and then with Julia. But in the end his machinations, like Uriah Heep's similar ones in *David Copperfield*, are foiled.

Carpenter reads Waugh's other works with equal ingenuity, interpreting them as manifestations of Waugh's disturbed psychology. He finds resentment of Waugh's father and jealousy of his brother Alec everywhere. In the short story "Winner Takes All," a slight, obvious satire of British upper-class devotion to primogeniture, the older brother, Gervase, who takes all, is Alec, and the younger, Tom, who is deprived of his deserts, is poor little Evelyn. "Ginger" Littlejohn in *Vile Bodies*, who robs the hero Adam of his beloved Nina, is clearly Alec (whose hair was ginger); moreover, in real life, he is John Heygate, who cuckolded Evelyn (though we aren't told what color *his* hair was). Charles Ryder's hostile father is of course Evelyn's, though it is hard to see the amiable Arthur Waugh as the sardonic Mr. Ryder, with his frequent interjections of "Such a lot of nonsense"—an expression he might have been tempted to use on encountering the statement that the dangerous swinging of the great bronze doors of the ocean liner in *Brideshead* during a storm is Waugh's "image of modern life, destroying its inhabitants."

Throughout *The Brideshead Generation* Mr. Carpenter brings to his subject the spirit of the social psychologist—his intestinal flora, as Germaine Greer might term it. He mourns that the hilarious Connolly brats in *Put Out More Flags* suffer "terrible social handicaps." No doubt their anti-social activities were a cry for help, like those of Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, and the Katzenjammer Kids, Hans and Fritz. They might all have been rehabilitated by psychotherapy provided by a welfare state—though that didn't seem to work with Miles Plastic in *Love Among the Ruins*. Perhaps the underlying moral of Carpenter's book is that it is a pity that Waugh's terrible social handicaps and psychological maladjustments hadn't been corrected in his youth. That too may be the basis of the attitude of many popular biographers toward the artistic biographees, Michelangelo, Beethoven, Byron, Wagner, Van Gogh—and Samuel John-

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son—at whose weird behavior and thinking they and their readers so much enjoy goggling. With professional help those deviants might have become normal, well-adjusted people just like ourselves. Since they didn't get it, we can, as Swift put it, "hug ourselves and reason thus, / It is not yet so bad with us." Hence the popularity of such works. Of course the removal of such social and psychological handicaps might have had the consequence that we should never have possessed their artistic achievements. But who cares about those?

Thinking Otherwise

THE EMPEROR'S NEW MIND: CONCERNING COMPUTERS, MINDS AND THE LAWS OF PHYSICS. *By Roger Penrose. Oxford University Press. $24.95.*

Reviewed by JOEL E. COHEN

Can a computer have a mind? Some people think so. Fans of artificial intelligence argue that a machine has a mind if the machine performs a sufficiently complex algorithm. An algorithm is a set of rules for manipulating symbols. An algorithm does for letters what choreography does for dancers. Since computers execute algorithms, and those algorithms could in principle be as complex as the human mind, proponents claim, computers can have a mind.

Roger Penrose thinks otherwise, and not just because some computer regularly sends him a bill for $0.00. His reasons fill a long (450 pages), fascinating, and highly original book, *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds and the Laws of Physics.* Penrose, the Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford, is a brilliant creator of mathematics and physical theories. His book has become a best-seller, but make no mistake: to grasp Penrose's argument is a real intellectual challenge.

Penrose's text bristles with equations, diagrams, and concepts from current research in logic, computer science, mathematics, physics, and neurophysiology. He treats in earnest detail electromagnetism, thermodynamics, relativity, quantum theory, black holes, the big bang, Turing machines, computability, Gödel's theorem, tilings, tessellations, and many other arcana. Given all this science, it comes as a shock that Penrose believes computers have no minds for reasons that are, at root, religious: a Platonic belief in an otherworldly reality of mathematical ideas.

Penrose's argument that minds are too complicated to be found in computers rests on a "reflection principle." "By 'reflecting' upon the meaning of the axiom system and rules of procedure," he explains, one may arrive at "further true mathematical statements that were not deducible from those very axioms and rules." Insight-filled pure thinking, he says, can arrive at conclusions that cannot be reached by formal, step-by-step calculations according to given rules. Thinking can beat algorithms. Therefore computers, which can only execute algorithms, can't have real minds, he claims.

Penrose's own experiences of mathematical insight, and similar reports by others, lead Penrose to affirmations of faith that can only be described as religious: " 'God-given' mathematical ideas should have some kind of timeless existence, independent of our earthly selves. . . ." "I imagine that whenever the mind perceives a mathematical idea, it makes contact with Plato's world of mathematical concepts. (Recall that according to the Platonic viewpoint, mathematical ideas have an existence of their own, and inhabit an ideal Platonic world, which is accessible via the intellect only. . .)." "I believe that (conscious) minds are *not* algorithmic entities. . . . I believe consciousness to be closely associated with the sensing of necessary truths—and thereby achieving a direct contact with Plato's world of mathematical concepts."

Evidently businessmen, journalists, mere empirical scientists (whose truths are all contingent), artists of every stripe, athletes, politicians, most teachers, factory workers, bus drivers, and lawyers have no conscious minds, if Penrose is right, because their lives do not lead to "the sensing of necessary truths." If ever there were a mathematics-centered view of the conscious mind, this is it. But Penrose's

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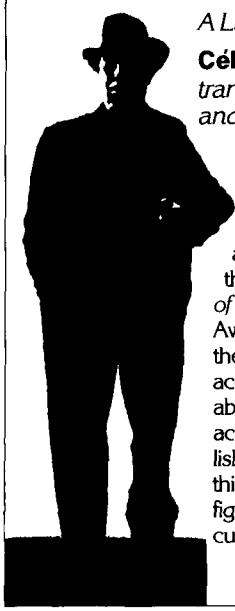

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Platonism is fortunately not universal among mathematicians.

Penrose concedes that brains are physical objects and governed by physical laws. If mathematical minds have access to truths that algorithms cannot attain, as Penrose claims, then there must be some shortcoming in algorithmic theories of physical objects. "It is our present lack of understanding of the fundamental laws of physics that prevents us from coming to grips with the concept of 'mind' in physical or logical terms," he writes.

A crucial gap in present physical theory, according to Penrose, is that there is no satisfactory explanation of the growth of certain crystalline-like substances called quasicrystals. In 1984, a quasicrystal was discovered that displays an icosahedral symmetry, a symmetry impossible for a strict crystal. These physical quasicrystals have their mathematical counterpart in Penrose's invention of mathematical shapes that could be used to tile a floor quasi-periodically with fivefold symmetry, a symmetry that is impossible for strictly periodic tilings.

"Now, a remarkable feature of the quasicrystalline tiling patterns . . . is that their assembly is necessarily *non-local*," Penrose writes. "In assembling the patterns, it is necessary, from time to time, to examine the state of the pattern many, many 'atoms' away from the point of assembly. . . . Their assembly cannot reasonably be achieved by the local adding of atoms one at a time, in accordance with the *classical* picture of crystal growth, but instead there must be a *non-local* essentially quantum-mechanical ingredient to their assembly."

Penrose speculates that similar non-local processes may govern the way the brain changes over time. "The brain is not really quite like a computer, but it is more like a computer which is continually changing. These changes . . . could be governed by something like the processes involved in quasicrystal growth." The least mystical statement of Penrose's viewpoint is that the lack of a physics of non-local effects prevents a physical explanation of mind.

I think it is a mistake to ask, "Can a computer have a mind?" as a yes-or-no question. For, as Penrose grants, "consciousness is a matter of degree." In ancient Greece, calculating with ratios was considered so difficult that a person who could do so was called rational. Today, calculating a ratio takes only dancing your fingers over a pocket calculator. By the standards of the ancient Greeks, perhaps the calculator has now been imbued with a certain limited rationality.

As people get better at instructing a computer to carry out mental functions, a computer can gradually acquire more of a mind. Perhaps when quasicrystals are incorporated as computing elements in machines of a future generation, and the growth of those quasicrystals helps determine the output of computations, machines will be imbued with minds by the standards of Penrose. Will a computer ever attain the brilliant mathematical insight of a Roger Penrose? Will a machine ever reflect deeply on the origins of its own consciousness? Wait and see.

The High Calculus of Fame

THE POLITICS OF LITERARY REPUTATION. *By John Rodden. Oxford University Press. $27.50.*

Reviewed by THOMAS J. NIEMAN

Unlike so many writers, George Orwell took few pains to shape his own reputation, apart from changing his name from Eric Blair and requesting that no biography of him be written. Where, for example, at one extreme Norman Mailer in *Advertisements for Myself* wrote an entire book on his own behalf, other more gifted and modest writers such as Evelyn Waugh and Edmund Wilson kept meticulous diaries and carefully preserved correspondence for future biographers. Yet Orwell, who did so little posturing for posterity, has fame that today surpasses them all. His works are discussed not only in intellectual circles but also in households and high schools on several continents. What exactly are the sources of Orwell's powerful reputation? How did such a reputation come to be? These questions form the basis of John Rodden's study *The Politics of Literary Reputation,*

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which goes some way toward explaining the vast body of intellectual commentary about Orwell since his death, in 1950, and how a writer of a number of notable essays and some splendid journalism but less than scintillating novels came to possess so extraordinary a reputation.

V. S. Pritchett more or less set the prevailing tone in the critical literature by announcing, in an obituary essay, that Orwell was "a kind of saint." But thanks to Jeffrey Meyers's *George Orwell: A Critical Heritage* (1975), one can trace fairly well the trajectory of Orwell's reputation as it developed during his lifetime. His early novels received polite, and usually very brief, notices; but by 1940 Q. D. Leavis at least had lowered the critical boom, writing in *Scrutiny*: "The only impression those dreary books left on me is that nature didn't intend him to be a novelist." By then Orwell had become a widely known and well-respected writer of such works as *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia*, but he was still a controversial enough figure to be attacked. Then his reputation soared with the publication of his last two, quite political novels. Edmund Wilson thought *Animal Farm* (1945) "absolutely first-rate"; and Arthur Koestler, a friend of Orwell's, raised the estimate even higher after the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-four* and his tragic early death, writing as part of his obituary in *The Observer*: "I believe that future historians of literature will regard Orwell as a kind of missing link between Kafka and Swift." Posthumous evaluations of Orwell maintained this high note of reverence for at least the next decade. But as the years passed, no clear consensus developed over what Orwell ought to be remembered for. Where Malcolm Muggeridge thought Orwell's "journalism was his best work," and George Steiner felt "Orwell persistently took journalism to the pitch of literature," John Wain cited *Homage to Catalonia* as Orwell's best book.

My own sense of Orwell was shaped largely by the publication of the *Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters* in 1979—the major Orwell publishing event in my time. In those four thick volumes, Orwell's keen mind shone forth brilliantly and led me back into his novels and books of reportage. Plain-spoken, commonsensical, no-nonsense, unpretentious, courageous, passionate—these were the qualities that I valued in Orwell. As a prose stylist, he was the master of the plain, unadorned sentence. He talked straight, and at times a bit tough, but time and again saying (or writing) what needed saying, and saying it memorably. My admiration for Orwell admitted few qualifications and remained constant over many years. Yet by the time I came to Professor Rodden's study, it seemed as if my estimate of Orwell had developed a slow leak, for Orwell's standing had somehow diminished. He had ceased to stand for any solid idea or position, since he had over the past several years become little more than a political badge that various writers had tried—sometimes desperately—to pin to their own causes. Normally one's estimate of a writer begins its downward adjustment with the arrival of biographies packed with unseemly detail—say, fascist sympathies or a trail of unpleasant prejudices—but Orwell's stature had suffered little from biographers. What did it in his case were the many contending versions of what he might have said or done had he not died as he did at so early an age.

Perhaps no essay on Orwell has received more notoriety than Mary McCarthy's "The Writing on the Wall," published in 1969. In that essay Miss McCarthy judged Orwell insufficiently radical for left-wing intellectuals of the sixties. At issue were Orwell's alleged views on such matters as British political leadership since the war and, especially, Vietnam. Miss McCarthy ultimately concluded that "it was a blessing for him probably that he died" when he did. Similarly, Irving Howe and Raymond Williams wrote essays in which each put forth his version of Orwell, and each essay was tinged with disappointment. Orwell's standing with the Left had slipped, no question about that. Then, slightly more than a decade later, in 1983, Norman Podhoretz mounted the neo-conservative charge for Orwell. It was based on Orwell's and the neo-conservative's shared liberal beliefs in decency, patriotism, and fierce anti-Communism; and a bit later Leopold Labedz strongly seconded this motion in the pages of *Encounter*. A great deal of energy seemed concentrated on fashioning a usable Orwell.

In *The Politics of Literary Reputation*, Professor Rodden sorts through the numerous and varied renderings of Orwell created over several decades and organizes a coherent if

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densely crowded picture. There are, according to Rodden, at least four major aspects (he calls them "faces") to Orwell's reputation: the rebel, the common man, the prophet, and the saint. His careful explanation of these four aspects of Orwell's reputation (as well as their origin) is to my thinking the most valuable part of his study. Each major aspect of his reputation has clear sources in Orwell's writing, and each appears to contribute in some measure to his enduring appeal.

In fact, so right do these aspects of Orwell seem that one needs to resist the urge simply to attach the works to them. *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-four* show Orwell the prophet; the essays and books of reportage, such as *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, feature Orwell the common man; *The Lion and the Unicorn* and *Homage to Catalonia* highlight the rebel; and several of the most famous essays ("Shooting an Elephant," "A Hanging") bring to mind the compassionate, saintly Orwell. Much the same can be done (and Rodden has pretty well done it) with the major critical studies about Orwell. These four aspects of Orwell's reputation in no way diminish Orwell or his work. Instead Rodden's book has added some depth and a layer of sophistication to my own estimate of Orwell, largely by making it clear how much Orwell's roles as prophet and rebel have added to his reputation.

While gratefully acknowledging that service, one must go on to say that no one would wish *The Politics of Literary Reputation* to be a jot longer. At four hundred densely packed pages, it already contains altogether too much. Accounts of Orwell's reputation inside the Soviet Union, the attacks upon him by feminist critics and by British Marxists—although within the purview of a study of reputation—are in the end of negligible importance to readers interested in Orwell. And that is the central problem of this book. Of Rodden's two main subjects, Orwell and literary reputation, only the first is developed very effectively. Despite a great deal of rhetorical posturing to create an aura of sophistication—discussions of "the notion of face," "reception acts," "hermeneutics," "the ideology of repute," "synchrony of repute," and so forth—Rodden says little of substance about how one writer acquires a reputation when another equally, or even more talented, writer does not.

On the subject of reputation, Rodden's study does something of a long flamenco dance, full of noise and movement and flourishes but all ultimately to very little purpose. His conclusion is that the numerous renderings of Orwell are just so many self-projections. Lionel Trilling's famous essay that prefaced the American edition of *Homage to Catalonia* reads "very much like a sketch of Trilling's ideal self," which turns out to be a combination of Isaiah Berlin and the late Sidney Hook. Likewise, "Howe's Orwell of 1969 is the figure Howe wished he might have been in the '60s." And so on for Raymond Williams and Norman Podhoretz ("Clearly, Hook is the figure in this Orwell carpet—though with a touch of Trilling"), until in his final pages Rodden summons the nerve to pursue this idea of self-projection to its conclusion: "We have fashioned the 'usable Orwells' we need. We have met the images and they are ourselves."

What never gets fully untangled in *The Politics of Literary Reputation* is to what degree these various and quite distinct aspects of Orwell's reputation are unique to him. Orwell blended in himself an extraordinary range of qualities. He loved England as a true patriot, yet possessed a left-winger's reforming zeal about it; he had a common enough upbringing, but the cultural refinements of a public school education at Eton; he wrote from the perspective of an intellectual on the Left, but served as a stringent critic of both leftists and intellectuals; he preached common sense, yet senselessly ruined his own health, helping to bring about his own early death. Though Rodden acknowledges Orwell as a Quixote-like figure—"the Zelig of modern intellectuals," he rather unhappily calls him, after the Woody Allen movie character—he never quite explains how this affects the issue of reputation. The closest Rodden comes is, "Orwell's reputation turns out to be of special interest precisely because its sharp discontinuities illustrate so graphically the heterogeneous reception of all writers." What remains unsaid is that several factors clearly predominate in building a writer's reputation.

One factor is what might be called strong voices, for reputations, like new ideas, tend to radiate from leading intellectuals to others in society. Thus, important essays by Lionel

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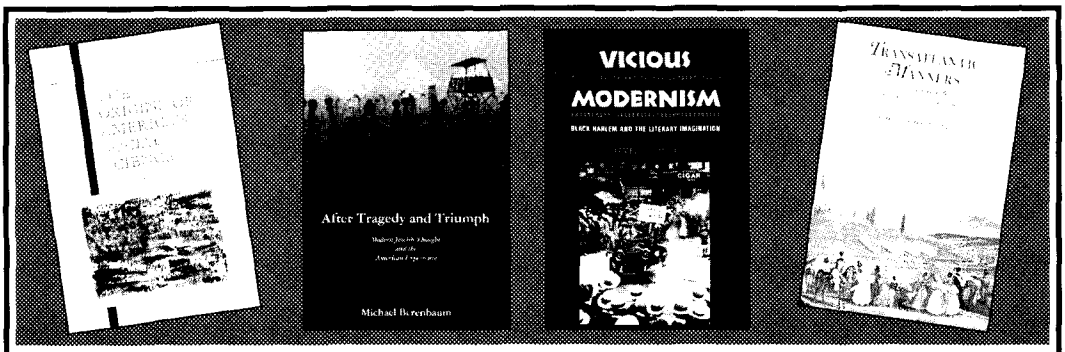

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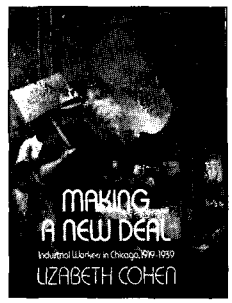

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Trilling, Arthur Koestler, John Wain, and others carry considerable weight, and they did much to establish Orwell's reputation. Second, the biographical details of a writer's life affect the estimation of him. Orwell's experiences as a tramp, a Burmese policeman, fighter with the P.O.U.M. militia, and early death enhance his life and set it apart from those who have lived either badly or more sedately. Third, Orwell lived through two world wars, time enough to see British imperialism die out and totalitarianism menace Europe; and the long Cold War that followed his death kept alive much of his polemical writing.

Such a brief summary ignores countless subtleties and deals with the matter of how reputations are formed altogether too quickly. But at least some lineaments of the matter are set out, which Rodden never manages. Within the academic culture for which he writes, plain-spokenness is just not highly valued. Admirers of Orwell's writing, who respect its directness and lack of pretension, will cringe while reading Rodden's heavy, academic prose. His writing follows the fashion current in academic circles of impressing upon readers the painstaking and delicate nature of a scholar's work. His chapters, across each of which are strewn as many as one and even two hundred footnotes, are completely shapeless and invariably feel too long. Further, the metaphors he uses to describe reputation ("faces," "stars" and "constellations," "diptych," "pedigree," and "genealogy") do not clarify so much as clang noisily into one another, signifying not very much.

In his autobiography *Making It*, Norman Podhoretz refers to "the higher calculus of fame." His metaphor seems an apt one, for certain variables of fame can be identified and put together in some sort of formulaic fashion, yet it is an abstruse, murky business, difficult for most of us to fathom, let alone understand. And the equation changes over time—indeed, for Orwell it is already changing. Now that 1984 has come and gone peaceably and as the threat of Communist totalitarianism recedes in this last decade of the century, how will Orwell's reputation fare? Because it is based on so many sources—his life, journalism, the books of reportage, the essays, the popular novels—his reputation is not likely to fade completely, though Orwell, who believed the only true test for a writer was survival, may one day before long be put to that very test.

Black Venus

JAZZ CLEOPATRA: JOSEPHINE BAKER IN HER TIME. *By Phyllis Rose. Doubleday. $22.50.*

JOSEPHINE BAKER. *Compilation by Bryan Hammond. Biography by Patrick O'Connor. Random House. $35.*

Reviewed by PETER DAILEY

Although Ernest Hemingway's recollections of persons he had known in Paris in the twenties were seldom complimentary, for the American dancer and singer Josephine Baker his admiration remained steadfast: she was "the most sensational woman anyone ever saw. Or ever will." Few who witnessed her triumphant debut with *La Revue Nègre* in Paris in 1925 would have disagreed. The distinguished ballet critic Andre Levinson reported that when the nineteen-year-old girl from East St. Louis made her appearance on the stage of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysees

> there seemed to emanate from her violently shuddering body, her bold dislocations, her springing movements, a gushing stream of rhythm. . . . In the short pas de deux of the savages . . . there was a wild splendor and magnificent animality. Certain of Miss Baker's poses, back arched, haunches protruding, arms entwined and uplifted in a phallic symbol, had the compelling potency of the finest examples of negro sculpture. . . . It was no longer a grotesque dancing girl that stood before them, but the black Venus that haunted Baudelaire.

As La Baker or "Bakhair," Josephine was soon Paris's reigning celebrity. For the next decade, her personality and exotic looks, and in particular her "light seal-skin brown" complexion—"with which," Colette recorded, "Paris is besotted"—were a source of endless fascination. Her appearance on Parisian boulevards in a brown Voisin with snakeskin upholstery, or at the casino at Deauville with her diamond-collared pet leopard Chiquita,

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was greeted by cheers. At her nightclub in Montmartre, Chez Josephine, patrons in dinner clothes drank champagne, while the scantily clad Josephine made her way from table to table, sliding in and out of laps, straightening ties, and kissing the tops of bald heads.

She spoke a charming blend of French and English with an apparent artlessness that the public found irresistible. She fired the starting pistol for the Tour de France, and landed Pernod endorsements and film contracts. Paris was taken with the Baker look: there were Josephine Baker dolls, costumes, and perfumes. Women wishing to emulate the star's sleekly coiffed appearance could do so with a hair preparation called Bakerfix. Her integration into the world of fashion was so complete that the dancer with the spit curl and long legs became a kind of art deco icon.

Artists and intellectuals were particularly drawn to the "beautiful brown electric body" and "whirlwind limbs" of the woman the English journalist Nancy Cunard called a "magnificent tornado." Jean Cocteau and Darius Milhaud had been on hand for her debut, part of an audience the like of which had not been seen since the heyday of the Ballets Russes. Foujita, Rouault, Marie Laurencin, Van Dongen, and Henri Laurens painted her. By Josephine's account, she sat for Picasso "many times." Although artists who actually worked with Josephine Baker, in whom the star temperament was very highly developed, did not always find the experience an unalloyed delight, there were plenty of prospective collaborators. Max Reinhardt announced that he would stage a production for Serge Lifar and her at his Deutsches Theater in Berlin. Kurt Weill wanted to write songs for her. George Balanchine gave her private classes. Le Corbusier, De Vlaminck, Gertrude Stein, and Pirandello all recognized in her something rich and strange. Although most of them seemed to have been primarily moved by her sensuality and exoticism, she was also capable of provoking a more complicated response.

In her biography of the dancer, *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time*, Phyllis Rose suggests that *La Revue Nègre* reflected the post-war modernist sensibility and, like Cubism, emphasized "angles and fragments rather than fluidity as a principle of coherence, frenetic energy rather than graceful lyricism." The Viennese architect Adolf Loos, whom Josephine had taught to Charleston, designed a house for her which, never built, is regarded as one of his masterpieces. Incorporating black and white slabs of marble, it would have centered around a swimming pool, set off by dramatic lighting, where the dancer's nymph-like frolicking could be viewed through walls of glass. Alexander Calder made a wire "Josephine Baker" mobile, which vibrates and slides as it revolves, that prefigured his later more sophisticated constructions.

For most of her career, however, Josephine's blend of exotic and primitive sensuality was one to which American audiences, both black and white, largely failed to respond. Her apotheosis by the French remains in many respects puzzling. For while her appeal is undeniable, there are essential aspects of it that elude us today. Phyllis Rose notes that when we look at film clips of Baker clad in a skirt of bananas, "her heinie" as one observer noted, vibrating "like a hummingbird," we see "a dancer who is energetic and contagiously happy, but not particularly sexy"—one who can "delight us, but not shock."

Was Josephine Baker's beauty more exuberant and provocative than that of the many dazzling members of the chorus line at the Cotton Club in Harlem who danced for white audiences in the celebrated revues of the early thirties? There seems no question that it was. One typical Folies-Bergère production number opened with Josephine, wrapped in veils, standing in a Moorish garden at nightfall. Colette's evocative description deserves to be quoted at length:

> The veils fall, and she steps over the fallen garments as over the parapet of a well and with one firm step she enters into nudity and gravity. . . . The years, and coaching, have perfected an elongated and discreet bone-structure and retained the admirable convexity of her thighs. Josephine's shoulder-blades are unobtrusive, her shoulders light, she has the belly of a young girl with a high placed navel. Naked except for three gilt flowers, pursued by her four assailants, she assumes the serious, unsmiling look of a sleepwalker, which ennobles a daring music-hall number. Her huge eyes, outlined in black and blue, gaze forth, her cheeks are flushed, the moist and dazzling sweetness of her teeth shows

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between dark and violet lips—her face shows no response to the quadruple embrace under which her pliant body seems to melt.

Such passages, and the caricatures, theater posters, programs, and sketches that Bryan Hammond has assembled for his fascinating compilation *Josephine Baker*, succeed in suggesting indefinable qualities that less impressionistic records fail to convey. As to whether Josephine Baker's audience was capable of such a discriminating response, of recognizing what was original and distinguishing about her, as well as the large element of self-parody, there is less reason to be confident. For most of them she seemed inseparable from the mythologizing process that surrounded her. The extraordinary vogue that Baker enjoyed made her, according to Phyllis Rose, "the focus for decades of theorizing about race." Professor Rose maintains that to review accounts of Baker's career is to "immerse oneself in the fantasy life of the French male in the years between the wars," a fantasy life she describes, with considerable understatement, as "regressive." The extravagant judgments of such contemporaries as Erich Maria Remarque, who told Baker that she "brought a blast of jungle air, elemental power and beauty, onto the tired stages of western civilization," by their complacency, and sheer incomprehension, ultimately suggest at least as much about that particular place and time as they do about Josephine Baker's personality and talents.

It would be an oversimplification, however, to regard Josephine Baker as purely a creation of the French, for her considerable ambition and energy had been directed toward recreating herself. Baker had first caught the public's attention as a sixteen-year-old member of the chorus line of *Shuffle Along*, Sissle and Blake's hit review. Because of prevailing racial stereotypes, opportunities in New York for a performer of Baker's particular talents and physical type were severely limited. The offer to appear on the Paris stage in *La Revue Nègre*, and later with the Folies-Bergère, represented a way out of this predicament. Although *Le Figaro* had put its seal on Josephine's triumph by criticizing it as "the most direct assault ever perpetrated against French taste," it was soon apparent that if she intended to make a career in France, she would have to turn herself into a French performer. In so doing, this uneducated, barely literate young woman displayed a single-mindedness and tenacity that were quite remarkable. Few, if any, of the many African American artists who have sought the recognition in Europe that was denied them at home have found the task as arduous, one that involved a fundamental compromise in the nature of their talent. Phyllis Rose reports that Josephine learned to walk down the staircase on the stage of the Casino de Paris like her great rival Mistinguett by making the descent with a load of books on her head, winking when she successfully reached the bottom.

In transforming herself, Josephine Baker was greatly assisted by the encouragement and shrewd counsel of her husband and business manager Count Pepito Abatino, an engaging Sicilian with the brilliantined hair, monocle, and pencil moustache of a lounge lizard. Rose observes that it is "too bad that Pepito's style of looks have passed out of favor. To us, he looks like a pimp. To Baker, he looked like Adolph Menjou." Journalists soon discovered that the two were not in fact married, Josephine having left at least one husband behind in the United States, and that Abatino, who spent most of his time hanging around clubs in Montparnasse, and was registered at the prefecture as a plasterer, was not a Count. Whether he was even a plasterer is open to question. "The Count doesn't know how to do anything but wear that monocle," Josephine explained to one interviewer. "Don't you think he looks cute?"

Josephine's metamorphosis was one that many felt ultimately diminished her, depriving her of what had been truly singular, and discordant, and exceptional about her art, including its urgency and power to disturb. e. e. cummings marveled that the "tall, vital, incomparably fluid nightmare" that he had seen on Broadway only a few years before now epitomized Parisian glamour. Janet Flanner noted, regretfully, that Baker "has, alas, almost become a little lady. . . . On that lovely animal visage lies now a sad look, not of captivity, but of dawning intelligence." The one quality that did survive was an inexhaustible gaiety, sly and worldly, with its own redeeming power.

This view was by no means universally shared. For many, Josephine's transformation

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into a star of the Paris music hall marked her fullest flowering as an artist. The case to be made for her as a singer is made eloquently, if not altogether convincingly, by Patrick O'Connor, whose study of Josephine Baker accompanies Bryan Hammond's collection. For O'Connor, the editor-in-chief of *Opera News*, Baker was a "wonderful" singer, whose light operatic technique was joined with a "sure instinct for timing and phrasing" suggestive of Le Jazz Hot. The songwriter Vernon Duke described her voice as a "small but quite exquisite colorature soprano" and recalled that when he wrote for Baker "two highly-spiced tropical arias with fioriture that would have scared Lily Pons out of her wits," the singer "mastered the acrobatic intervals and larynx-defying trills like a trouper." She was one of the handful of singers, O'Connor argues, whose interpretive gifts "made the Chanson Parisienne such an art form." The tradition of the Paris music hall, of which Josephine Baker was one of the last great exemplars, was, O'Connor states, "as closely scrutinized by its critics in France as any production of the Comedie Française or Opera." He writes informatively both about this rather esoteric subject and about the work of Poiret, Vionnet, Balenciaga, and the other couturieres whose elaborate gowns and costumes came to play a more and more conspicuous part in Josephine Baker's stage performances.

After ten years as the toast of Europe, Josephine set her sights on New York, and in 1936 announced that she would appear with the *Ziegfeld Follies*. Despite the efforts of such collaborators as George Balanchine, who staged several numbers for her, and Vincente Minnelli, who designed her costumes, the result was a disaster. The *Philadelphia Ledger* scored her "impersonation of a French songstress." "After her cyclonic career abroad," Brooks Atkinson observed in the *New York Times*, "Josephine Baker has become a celebrity who offers her presence instead of her talent." He concluded that she had "refined her art until there is nothing left in it," and contrasted her unfavorably with the Nicholas Brothers, the tap-dancing team whose smartness and panache "restored your faith in dusky revelry."

Her humiliation in her own country was personal as well as professional. Nothing in her long sojourn in Europe had prepared her for the reality of race relations in New York. At the St. Moritz Hotel the management forced her to use the service elevator. At a party for George Gershwin, when Baker made her entrance, letting her white mink slide from her shoulders to the floor, Beatrice Lillie muttered audibly, "Who dat?" It would be another fifteen years before Josephine Baker, unchastened and unrepentant, was finally accepted by American audiences. For the increasingly urbane public, O'Connor explains, the fact that the "fiery performer who appeared to have been dancing on hot cinders," owed more to the Quartier St. Denis than she did to Harlem, was no longer an insurmountable obstacle. If Josephine had once represented an imaginary America to the French, she now, Professor Rose notes, like Piaf or Maurice Chevalier, represented an imaginary France to Americans.

During Josephine's long stay in France, her ties to black audiences and the black vernacular tradition of entertainment had become increasingly attenuated. At her infrequent appearances at black theaters the response could be unpredictable. On one occasion, as she made her entrance on the stage of the Apollo, discarding her fur cape with the world-weary nonchalance of a Parisienne chanteuse, she was greeted by raucous shouts of "Pick that thing up, gal!" Phyllis Rose suggests that her career in Europe, her white husbands, and her penchant for addressing other Americans in French, came to be seen by many black Americans as a form of betrayal. Her personal history seemed troublingly similar to the archetypal pattern of the "tragic mulatto" who forsakes her own people only to find acceptance in the larger world ultimately unattainable.

In fact, few foreigners have ever enjoyed the sort of sustained and affectionate regard that Josephine Baker received in her fifty years in France. For her, there was never any sense of exclusion or embattlement. Cocteau hailed her as one of the caryatids adorning the temple of French art. At her death in 1975, she received a state funeral, and thousands lined the streets to watch the cortege making its way to the Madeleine. Few expatriates have ever looked less longingly at home. As an eleven-year-old, Josephine had lived through the East St. Louis riot of 1917, the memory of

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which seemed to evoke for her not only the savagery of American racism but the entire desolate emotional landscape of her childhood. A series of ghosted autobiographies were all versions of the Cinderella story: how a poor black girl had escaped the degradation of racism and poverty and achieved an undreamed of success in Europe. As to what she had come to represent for her European audiences and her complicity in it all, she was much less explicit. As her subtitle, *Josephine Baker in Her Time*, suggests, Phyllis Rose is less concerned with Josephine Baker as an artist than with the way her career as the first international black star was shaped by European exoticism and "the many forms of the limiting fiction of race." This engrossing episode in French and American cultural history is told by Professor Rose in a lively manner, with many deft insights and felicitous turns of phrase. While her book is about the limitations of art, and the intransigence of cultural forces that even imagination, will, and a defiant insistence on individual autonomy are unable to transform, it also serves to remind us of art's surprising possibilities.

The Unknown Leonard Woolf

LETTERS OF LEONARD WOOLF. *Edited by Frederick Spotts. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $29.95.*

Reviewed by SONYA RUDIKOFF

Suppose Leonard Woolf had not married Virginia. He had gone out to Ceylon reluctantly in 1904. In 1911, aged thirty-one, he was trying to decide whether to return to his government post in Ceylon, uninspired about his future as an agent of the British imperial vision. In 1904, other, more interesting careers had been ruled out by his modest financial prospects, and by obligations to his widowed mother and nine siblings. This very bright young man had done poorly in his examinations at Cambridge and for the Civil

✪ SONYA RUDIKOFF is currently writing an essay on contemporary assumptions about Victorian feminism and anti-feminism.

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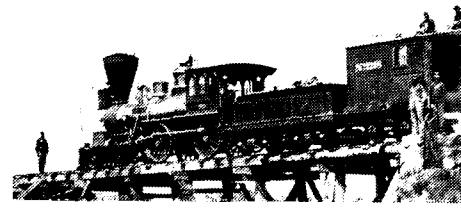

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Service, and so was forced to take the job in Ceylon. In 1911, after seven years of colonial duties, he returned to England for home leave. He fell in love with Cambridge again and with all that he had missed in that remote Ceylonese outpost, all the modernity that had replaced the late Victorian world of his youth. And, not surprisingly, he also fell in love with Virginia Stephen, the sister of a Cambridge friend. The decision about Ceylon was entangled with his passion for Virginia, his disaffection from his own colonial role, and other ambitions. Leonard Woolf had always been drawn to literature, and he thought of himself as a writer. In fact, he had already begun writing his widely admired novel about Ceylon, *The Village in the Jungle*, which would be published in 1913.

He might have returned and subsequently risen in the ranks of colonial administration there to become colonial secretary or governor of the Crown Colony—Sir Leonard Woolf, K.C.M.G., knowledgeable, competent, and admired. He had been a great success in Ceylon, inspiring trust both in his white superiors and colleagues, and in his Sinhalese and Tamil subordinates. The work had been fascinating and challenging, despite primitive conditions, superstition, disease, and poverty, and even including those appalling scenes of cruelty and degradation in which he had to intervene as a government agent. The work required travel throughout Ceylon, mostly by bicycle or bullock cart; the work was in Jaffna, Kandy, Hambantota, in villages, jungles, colonial stations, in settlements or by the sea. He responded intensely to the landscape and to the people. Although he had been placed there to exercise power over the native peoples, this disciple of G. E. Moore and devoted member of the Apostles was always attentive to the individual ideas of those he dealt with, as if the village headmen were also Apostles. He noted especially the supple and subtle minds of the Sinhalese, whom he found beautiful and sympathetic. For the young man from Kensington, Putney, and Cambridge, it was an extraordinary experience to encounter that range of persons, to have some effective work among them, and to live a practical political life after the philosophical and theoretical life of Cambridge.

Leonard Woolf might have married one of the young women so often found in those colonial outposts passionately playing tennis. Some of them are described in *Growing*, the second volume of his autobiography, women who were well suited to advance and support the career of a promising civil servant. Or he might have married someone in England, one of the countless young women from middle-class families who were as searching and questioning as he was, disdaining the conventions of the Victorian tea table, the Victorian dining room, the Victorian bedroom. Those Edwardian years were a time of profound questions for both men and women. The crisis of the self felt in Ceylon was also felt back in London and Surrey and Hampshire. It was a time when many young men, if they married, chose the sisters of their friends from school or university, or the daughters of tutors or professors. Could Leonard Woolf have married Maynard Keynes's sister, Margaret, or one of the Stracheys? One of the Maitland sisters, or a sister of Norton, the mathematician, or someone of the Trevelyan family? Well, he chose the sister of Thoby Stephen, the Cambridge friend known as "The Goth" because his demeanor suggested the majestic, "monolithic" bearing of a medieval knight. After an intense but difficult courtship, Leonard and Virginia married in 1912. Her recurrent mental illness showed itself again in 1913, and soon the outlines of Leonard Woolf's life became clear. Photographs of him during the years from 1915 to 1918 give a poignant glimpse of this man looking into his future. The story of the Woolfs' marriage has often been recounted, and, in fact, it has become an important branch of the Woolf scholarship of recent years. But Leonard would become much more than Virginia Woolf's husband.

If Leonard and Virginia Woolf had not married, he would have had a different career, perhaps even a more fulfilled realization of his gifts. Possibly he might have written more fiction than the stories, the acclaimed *Village in the Jungle*, and the much less successful *Wise Virgins* (1914), which outraged his bourgeois Jewish family in Putney. Leonard Woolf participated actively in the life of his times as writer, editor, publisher, reviewer, and political activist. The Hogarth Press, founded in the Woolf's dining room in 1917, with a tiny hand press that Leonard and Virginia taught themselves to operate, became a notable En-

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glish publishing house. Among its other contributions to knowledge, the Press, as early as 1924, began publishing significant works of Freud, and other psychoanalytic writers, culminating in the twenty-four volumes of the standard edition of Freud's work, 1953–1966. He was active early in the Fabian Society, in the cooperative movement, in the Labour party, and in the intelligent political and literary journalism of his time. He lectured, participated in conferences on the political and social questions of national and international life, and might have made another more successful stand for Parliament. Numerous books, studies, reports, memoranda, letters, articles, and reviews on social and political subjects were produced by Leonard Woolf beginning in 1912 and continuing almost to his death in 1969. Among them was a report on the causes of war. The report was first commissioned by the Fabian Society and subsequently published in 1916, under the title of *International Government*, in which an imaginative and prophetic conception of a League of Nations was proposed. It is not generally known that his report was used extensively by the British delegation to the Peace Conference and the Versailles Conference. His understanding of the problems in colonial governance and self-government in Ceylon, and in the Empire altogether, was similarly advanced, and was based on studies and reports he worked on for a Labour Party Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions. Even now, more than twenty years after his death, and eighty years since his service there, Sri Lankans still acclaim his thoughtful, candid grasp of their nation's identity. He died before the development of "subaltern studies," which provides a different perspective on the post-colonial psychology of the peoples in the old British Empire. What would he have made of all that?

Leonard Woolf's experience in Ceylon, and the philosophical attitudes of his university days, prepared him to understand industrial society not so much ideologically or morally but structurally, and in terms of social institutions and processes; the primitive village life of the Crown Colony prepared him for trade unions, party politics, and the ancient immemorial life of a Sussex village. His late Victorian and Edwardian social idealism was not swamped by early Bolshevism and Leninism, nor by the fuzzy confusions in the 1920s and 1930s about fascism, Stalinism, nazism, and their depredations. This gave him a seemingly idiosyncratic political stance, which often offended his intellectual friends and leftist journalist friends.

The Woolfs were married nearly thirty years. After Virginia's death in 1941, Leonard lived another twenty-eight years and died in 1969 at the age of eighty-nine. The final third of his life, inaugurated by the pain and horror of her suicide, would eventually be a time of renewed energy and activity for him—of writing, political life, publishing, travel, and personal relationships. He always maintained an extraordinary correspondence: this selection of some six hundred letters was made from an existing eight thousand letters, which in turn represent only a fraction of the number he wrote. These eight thousand survived bombings, numerous house and office moves, losses, and destruction by others. (He also wrote constantly—memoranda, in diaries, notebooks, and financial account books; when they were given to the University of Sussex, there were sixty thousand items.) In this selection, Frederick Spotts reviews several

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stages of Leonard's life, grouping the letters thematically and providing useful introductory comments for each section. The selection was an enormous undertaking and has been done with great care.

Some letters from the correspondents themselves are deftly included, sometimes even a sequence of letters and replies. There are crisp exchanges on immortality between Woolf and Lord Fisher of Lambeth (the former Archbishop of Canterbury), and on the difference between terrorism and heroism; there are several exchanges with H. G. Wells and A. L. Rowse about the source of remarks Wells found insulting. There are the compelling letters from Leonard in Ceylon to Lytton Strachey, whose long friendship with Woolf had begun at Cambridge—a friendship marked by tremendous intimacy and candor, loyalty, and shared social and intellectual ideas, but which was not a homosexual relationship despite Strachey's well-known habits. There are extremely interesting comments on religious ideas from this English atheist, brought up as a Reformed Jew, but not associated with any religious observance or identification, profoundly skeptical of all theological claims but not unmindful of the Jewish part of his identity. There are the passionate love letters sent off to Virginia Stephen, as they began their relationship in 1911, and later, in 1912, when she was in a rest home, or when they were apart during their turbulent courtship. There are some family letters. The love for his friend Trekkie Parsons that marked the last third of his life is represented by a number of letters to her, and by indirect indications of her place in his life. There are no letters from Leonard Woolf's early years, nothing that shows the child in the family, or the school, none of the feeling and experience of his first twenty years. The distinctive person he would become had already been created before the letters of 1901.

Spotts notes that before World War I there were eight postal deliveries a day in London, as well as deliveries on Sundays and holidays; letters posted during the day would normally be received and read within a few hours, or by the next morning. From Ceylon, Leonard Woolf knew that his letters would take three weeks to arrive in England, or from England, if they made the right boat. The voice employed in those letters of eighty years ago, or even of fifty years ago, was distinctively different from the voice familiar to us in contemporary letters: it was curiously more direct, more individual, more autonomous, despite our ostensibly freer contemporary manners. The letter was the only form available for literate persons, even the minimally literate —an established form for conveying a thought, a wish, a feeling, a disagreement. Its frequent use insured that no single letter would have to serve as the sole means of communication, and that no single instance of this written communication would be compelled to be the agency of an explosive, totalizing, confessional outburst. No single intense expression would bring all correspondence to an end. Instead, there would be a more restrained but continuing epistolary conversation. This is especially evident in Leonard Woolf's exchanges with Lord Fisher, whose views about the heroism of Arab terrorists seemed to countenance and even accept the murder of Israeli schoolchildren as a heroic act. Woolf's disagreement and outrage were plain; but he pursued the argument rationally, even acknowledging that he and his correspondent would not, perhaps would never, agree. There is a sense that they could nevertheless exchange letters again, if it were necessary, despite their profound differences. A similar example of the value of disagreement and the precise refinement of ideas can be seen in some of the letters to Kingsley Martin about articles in the *New Statesman* that Woolf thought were dishonest about the Soviet Union, and in exchanges with Victor Gollancz about the publication of Leonard's *Barbarians at the Gate* (1939), which the Left Book Club thought was not sufficiently sympathetic to Stalin and Soviet Communism. Woolf was not one of the "great" letter writers, did not write quotable "perfect" letters, but his style was crisp and economical in these exchanges, and his deliberate clarity could have been disarming.

The question of publishing Virginia Woolf's letters, diary, and other material arose in his later years, amid the resurgence of interest in her work. He was besieged by requests: there were problems of copyright, of scandalous or painful revelations in the letters; there were personal claims, such as Vita Sackville West's desire to have her letters to and from Virginia Woolf published; there

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were violations of permission, disagreement about purpose and interpretation—all the responsibilities for a literary estate that descended upon Leonard Woolf after Virginia's suicide. A recent tendency in the criticism and scholarship about Virginia Woolf to find Leonard's relation to his wife uncomprehending, cruel, dominating, heartless, and inimical to her literary and personal goals is not supported by a thoughtful reading of these letters.

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Reasoning Why

HOMOSEXALITY: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY. *By Michael Ruse. Basil Blackwell. $19.95.*

Reviewed by PAUL BLOOM and EDWARD STEIN

The controversy about why some people are gay and others are not often generates a considerable amount of heat. These issues are important; they affect the way we look at ourselves, the people around us, and the society we live in. While a great deal has been written recently on homosexuality, few have taken a hard look at it from the standpoint of analytic philosophy. This is unfortunate, because the issues surrounding homosexuality are muddled, and eliminating this sort of confusion is one of the things analytic philosophers claim to do best. Philip Kitcher, for instance, recently offered a trenchant philosophical critique of the assumptions underlying sociobiology and succeeded in clarifying some of the disputes within that field. What is clearly needed is for someone to write a similar study of the theories and prejudices surrounding questions of sexual preference.

Michael Ruse's new book, *Homosexuality: A Philosophical Inquiry,* purports to be such a study. It consists of two parts: the first a discussion of the origins of homosexuality, the second an ethical inquiry into such questions as whether or not homosexuality should be regarded as a sickness, a perversity, or a moral wrong. While Ruse's ethical arguments are interesting, the innovative part of this book is his discussion of why some people are gay and others are not. This is the section worth focusing on. Although Ruse clearly and cleverly describes the competing theories, there are several important ways in which he goes wrong. These flaws are worth discussing, because they reflect general problems in the way many people approach these issues.

First of all, Ruse fails to acknowledge that, from the standpoint of scientific inquiry, it is mistaken to focus only on the origins of homosexuality. Ruse's failure to appreciate this shows up even in the book's title; why not *Heterosexuality: A Philosophical Inquiry*? What is of interest is the origin of sexual orientations of any (and every) sort. This amounts to more than a plea for equal time for heterosexuals and bisexuals; any serious discussion of theories of homosexuality must evaluate these theories according to how well they can explain *all* sexual orientations. There is a temptation to assume that, since heterosexuality is "the norm," it needs no explanation. This is a mistake—explaining why a heterosexual woman wants to have sex with a

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man is no easier than explaining why a lesbian wants to have sex with a woman. Implicitly, Ruse seems to know this: every theory of homosexuality he considers was developed in the context of an already existing theory of heterosexuality. However, the puzzle of non-homosexual orientations is never directly addressed by Ruse, leaving his critical analysis somewhat limited.

A more subtle issue has to do with the way Ruse looks at homosexuality. One would expect that Ruse, as a philosopher, would consider various views of what homosexuality is, as well as different ways of studying it. In fact, from the very start, he adopts some strong (and mostly implicit) notions and uses them throughout. These show up in several places, most notably in his discussion of social constructionism, his adoption of the Kinsey scale, and in his review of different theories about "gay genes."

Roughly, social constructionism views such concepts as "heterosexual" and "homosexual" not as categories of a scientific theory but rather as constructs that exist relative to a particular culture, specifically, *our* culture. In other words, constructionists deny that "homosexual" should be viewed as the same sort of concept as "hydrogen atom" or "prime number," and instead take it to be a term like "shortstop," which is more of a social invention than part of an objective reality. They are not denying, of course, that there have always been some people who prefer physical intimacy with those of their own sex and others who prefer people of the opposite sex, but they are denying that this way of splitting up people is scientific and culture-independent. If the constructionists are right, then it is a mistake to lump together those who engage in homosexual sex in twentieth-century North America with those who engaged in homosexual sex in ancient Greece. Or, worse still, to lump together gay men in America with male baboons that engage in same-sex intercourse.

Ruse only discusses the most extreme sort of constructionist view and quickly dismisses it. This is mystifying from a philosopher, particularly given the popularity of constructionism among some of the people working in Gay Studies, as well as among scholars inspired by Foucault's work. It is also worth noting that Ruse's own position of essentialism is not one he consistently embraces. At the very end of his book, in a discussion of Affirmative Action, Ruse suggests that there is no objective criterion for being gay. Nevertheless, he frequently talks about homosexuals and heterosexuals as if he were a doctor talking about people with blood type A and blood type B. At least to some extent, this just has to be the wrong approach. Even if the theory of social constructionism is mistaken, it is unlikely that intuitive categories of sexual behavior—gay, straight, and bisexual—will turn out to be the categories explained by an advanced theory of sexual orientation. This rejection of seemingly natural ways of looking at the world happens all the time in emerging fields of knowledge; contrary to what one first thought, whales are mammals, not fish, and glass is a liquid, not a solid. It would be surprising if the notions of sexuality picked up on the streets and off bathroom walls turned out to be true.

Ruse's own definition of homosexuality is strongly influenced by the Kinsey scale, the standard diagnostic for sexual orientation used by researchers working in the field of human sexuality. This scale assigns every person a number from zero to six, according to the way they respond to a series of questions about their sexual desires and practices. Zero stands for exclusive heterosexuality and six stands for exclusive homosexuality. This scale is useful for carrying out certain empirical studies, some of which are reviewed by Ruse. But a major problem with the scale involves its handling of bisexuality. Everyone who is neither primarily heterosexual nor primarily homosexual is classified as either two, three, or four. So the scale lumps together people who are not attracted to either sex, people who are strongly attracted to both sexes, straight women who have occasional lesbian fantasies, gay men who as teenagers have had sex with women, and so on. Ruse spends only a couple of sentences discussing bisexuality and never returns to it (except in the context of Freud's view that, in some sense, everyone is born bisexual), leaving bisexuals trapped in the limbo between two and four. As a result, Ruse's discussion of different theories of the origin of sexual preference suffers. For instance, none of the sociobiological theories that he reviews gives any hint of how to explain the existence of bisexuals—yet another instance of Ruse failing to see that a

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theory of homosexuality has also to be a theory of heterosexuality and bisexuality.

An analogy here can be made with the problem of developing accurate measures of masculinity and femininity. Working independently, Sandra Bem and Janet Spence pointed out that there is something seriously wrong with viewing masculinity and femininity, defined in terms of conformity to gender stereotypes, as opposite sides of a scale. They suggest that masculinity and femininity should be viewed as independent sets of traits; somebody can have a very high (or very low) degree of masculinity and at the same time have a very high (or very low) degree of femininity. This conflicts with a Kinsey-style view of gender characteristics, where high masculinity entails low femininity, and high femininity entails low masculinity. Bem and Spence's critique extends naturally to the issue of sexual orientation; contrary to the Kinsey scale, human sexuality might not be unidimensional. That a person is highly attracted to members of his or her own sex doesn't necessarily imply that the same person is not attracted to members of the opposite sex and vice versa. In fact, a study by Michael Storms suggests that bisexuals tend to be as attracted to their own sex as exclusive homosexuals are and as attracted to the opposite sex as exclusive heterosexuals are. This is not to deny that there is an important insight behind the Kinsey scale—most people do end up at one of the extreme poles of sexual orientation—but by uncritically adopting a unidimensional scale, Ruse gives up the opportunity to present an accurate discussion of bisexuality.

A final problem emerges in Ruse's chapter on sociobiological theories, a much modified version of an earlier paper called "Are There Gay Genes?" published in *Journal of Homosexuality* in 1981. From the standpoint of sociobiology, the continued existence of homosexuals is a puzzle. Sociobiologists claim that much of human behavior is not learned, but is instead determined by the process of natural selection acting on genes, which leads to the persistence of behavioral traits that are beneficial to reproduction. It is hard to think of a trait *less* conducive to reproduction than a propensity to have sexual intercourse with members of the same sex to the exclusion of the opposite sex. Given this, coming up from sociobiological theories of homosexuality tends to be tricky. After a lengthy discussion of some general issues surrounding sociobiology, Ruse considers some proposals of how homosexuality can be explained within a sociobiological framework.

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Once again, Ruse's discussion exhibits a certain narrowness of focus here. He sets up the issue as if the only thing sociobiologists need to do is to identify the pressures that would "select for" homosexual behavior; they need only explain why being gay is good for your genes. Although interesting, such an account is only a first step toward coming up with an adequate theory of sexual preference. Homosexuality is sensibly defined in terms of what people think and do, and the link from genes to thoughts and actions is mediated by the brain. Sociobiologists often overlook this. In discussing homosexuality, they will often argue that "gay genes" cause people to engage in same-sex intercourse. But this is just a confused way of thinking about the issue. What *is* possible is that evolutionary pressures could lead to the selection of genes that cause individual members of a species to have certain mental mechanisms relevant to sexual interaction. During the course of an individu-

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al's development, these mechanisms interact with the environment to produce certain sexual preferences, which in turn lead to certain types of behavior. The stress on cognitive structure is more than a protest against loose talk by sociobiologists; it points to a serious gap in their theories.

Although Ruse never mentions it, a strong relationship exists between sociobiology and psychology. There are two general classes of psychological theories: nativist and empiricist. Nativist theories posit unlearned mental structures that underlie our understanding of complex domains (such as vision, language, etc.), while empiricist theories stress experience and assume less innate machinery. Implicit in the sociobiological enterprise is a highly nativist view of thought and action. If an intimate connection exists between genes and sexual behavior, then there is good reason to believe that humans have neural structures especially devoted to the development of sexual preference. Ruse does not see this, and as a result fails to spell out the extent to which sociobiological theories of sexual preference lead to the conclusion that sexual preferences are not learned but are rather "hard-wired" into the brain. There is nothing particularly unlikely about a nativist theory of sexual preference—in fact, studies of the effects of prenatal exposure to hormones on sexual orientation (discussed in Ruse's chapter 5) strongly support such a view. But this conclusion, however plausible, needs to be examined and elaborated, not just assumed.

What might an explicit theory of hard-wired sexual preference look like? One possibility is that there are innate mental images of female and male genitalia such that, if you have one sort of gene you will be stimulated by penises, and if you have another you will be stimulated by vaginas. No direct empirical evidence supports such a claim. However, it is suggestive that human infants apparently have the innate ability to distinguish male and female faces. Alternatively, genes could play a more subtle role in determining sexual preference. Perhaps as a result of genetic programming, heterosexuals imitate the social and sexual behavior of members of their own sex, while homosexuals imitate members of the opposite sex. The general observation that children tend to imitate adults of the same sex is well supported by research in social development (research, incidentally, that Ruse dismisses as irrelevant to explaining homosexual orientation). Moreover, such an account would be consistent with research suggesting that sexual preference is strongly linked with gender-appropriate behavior in children. This research, although it has more than its share of methodological flaws, gives some reason to believe that adult gay men tend to be "sissies" as children, and adult lesbians tend to be "tomboys." If sociobiologists ever hope to explain sexual preference, theories that bridge the gap from genes to behavior must be developed.

The paradigmatic nativist theory concerns language, and in many ways this can provide a model for sociobiological theorizing about sexuality. Based largely on the theories of Noam Chomsky, many scientists have argued that humans innately represent abstract universal principles of grammar that enable us to rapidly acquire whatever language we encounter. Studies of the linguistic abilities of children and adults have led to the development of a number of interesting theories of the child's innate linguistic knowledge. In comparison, the nativist theories of sexual orientation implicit in sociobiological theory exist in an empirical and theoretical vacuum.

To get a feeling for how bad the situation is for sociobiology, consider the two theories presented by Ruse (he presents three, but, as he notes, one of them is indisputably false). The first is "kin selection," the theory that people become gay because they "calculate" that for some reason they would not be efficient at producing viable offspring. Thus they forgo sexual reproduction and turn instead to helping their close relatives reproduce and raise offspring. Since their relatives share some of their genetic material, this strategy could be effective for vicariously passing on their genes. The motivation for this sort of theorizing comes from the sociobiological theory of the continued existence of sterile insects. This theory proposes that sterile insects are selected for because they devote time and energy to helping their relatives survive (and thereby reproduce); as a result, the genes responsible for the existence of sterile insects are passed on.

The second theory, what Ruse calls "parental manipulation," has the same logic as kin selection but this time the individual doesn't

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make the decision to be gay but rather his or her parents make that calculation. If they perceive that the child is sickly or unfit (and thus unlikely to reproduce efficiently), they act in such a way that transforms him or her into a homosexual. On this view, parents do this because a gay son or daughter will devote time and energy to helping his or her siblings survive (and thereby reproduce). In other words, a sickly child is more valuable (from the standpoint of spreading the parents' genes) as a helpful homosexual than as a childless heterosexual. Of course, nobody assumes that people consciously decide to become gay in order to spend more time helping their close relatives, or that parents ever get together over the dinner table and decide to turn Johnny, their sickly child, into a homosexual. Presumably all of this is done through unconscious mental calculations.

In the discussion of these theories, Ruse bemoans the fact that few experimental studies test the predictions that follow from them. But this is not the problem; in fact, the theories are so ridiculous that such research would almost certainly be a total waste of time. It is *possible* that people have mental mechanisms that cause them to become gay when they think they have a low chance of reproductive success. It is also possible that parents compute the potential reproductive fitness of their child and, if they get a certain result, act in such a way so as to make him or her gay. But there is no shortage of *possible* theories. Perhaps people become gay when they (unconsciously) determine that the political climate is more conducive to homosexuality. Or maybe (as some people seem to think) children unconsciously adopt the sexual orientation of their first-grade teacher. There is no reason to prefer the sociobiologist's theories to the ones proposed above, since they all share the same extremely small degree of plausibility.

When considering these theories, Ruse reviews some of the anthropological literature on the status of homosexuals across cultures, but he does not ask some of the more obvious questions. For instance, if kin selection is correct, then children with no siblings or cousins should never be gay. Is this true? Both kin selection and parental manipulation assume that homosexuals somehow turn to helping their close relatives. What reason is there for believing this? How can these theories account for adults who were once sickly children from large families, but who are nevertheless heterosexual? How can they account for bisexuals? Finally, consider the manifest implausibility of the view that parents can, in some subtle way, make their children gay. (Ruse at one point calls this view "ludicrous," and yet he nevertheless takes it quite seriously.)

None of the other views that Ruse considers are as unsupported as the sociobiological theories, although some of the psychoanalytic theories come close. The strategy of Ruse's book appears to be to take the hypotheses with the least empirical support and give them the most extensive discussion. So a post-Freudian theory that Ruse views as "more of a movement than a fruitful scientific option" is the topic of an entire chapter, while research in the field of cognitive development (where the experimental work is of relatively high quality) is the focus of a rather listless five-page discussion at the tail end of a chapter called "Freud: Extensions and Replacements." The only serious theories that Ruse discusses at length are those having to do with the effects of hormones on sexual preference. With these theories Ruse provides a lucid and careful analysis.

Why does Ruse spend so much time discussing poor theories? One might argue that he is simply trying to canvas all the possibilities. He might be trying to consider every conceivable theory to set the stage for the discussion of ethical issues that immediately follows. But this defense won't work. While it does account for why Ruse *considers* the less plausible views, it does not explain why he devotes so much time to them, particularly at the expense of more reasonable proposals. Ruse himself emphasizes that the theoretical review is important in its own right as an "epistemological" inquiry. So Ruse is clearly attempting to do serious intellectual work with this theoretical review. Given this, he has some responsibility to give a balanced and scientifically informed view of the field. Unfortunately, he does not. He gives the impression that the research on homosexuality is a hodgepodge of dogmatic claims and half-baked ideas, with no particular theory standing above the rest. Ruse owes his readers a more critical analysis of which theories are

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worth taking seriously and which are not. In his chapter "Determinism and Reductionism," Ruse is at pains to show how the different sorts of theories he reviews—sociobiological, Freudian, and hormonal—are compatible, although here he has to invent some very clever stories to make everything mesh. By ending his review with this sort of "grand compromise," where *all* the different theories turn out to be true in some way or another, Ruse makes the field look a lot less promising (and interesting) than it really is.

Despite these problems, Ruse should be applauded for his lucid and provocative discussion of homosexuality. His scope is considerable, and he asks many interesting questions. If he intended to stimulate interest in the philosophical issues surrounding sexual preference, then his aim is admirable, particularly considering the distance that contemporary philosophers keep from this topic. Nevertheless, *Homosexuality: A Philosophical Inquiry* is far from a definitive discussion of the current theories of human sexuality. Ruse's work is best viewed as a first attempt at addressing a range of deep and complex issues. Perhaps it will provoke others to think seriously about the scientific and philosophical issues surrounding sexual orientation.

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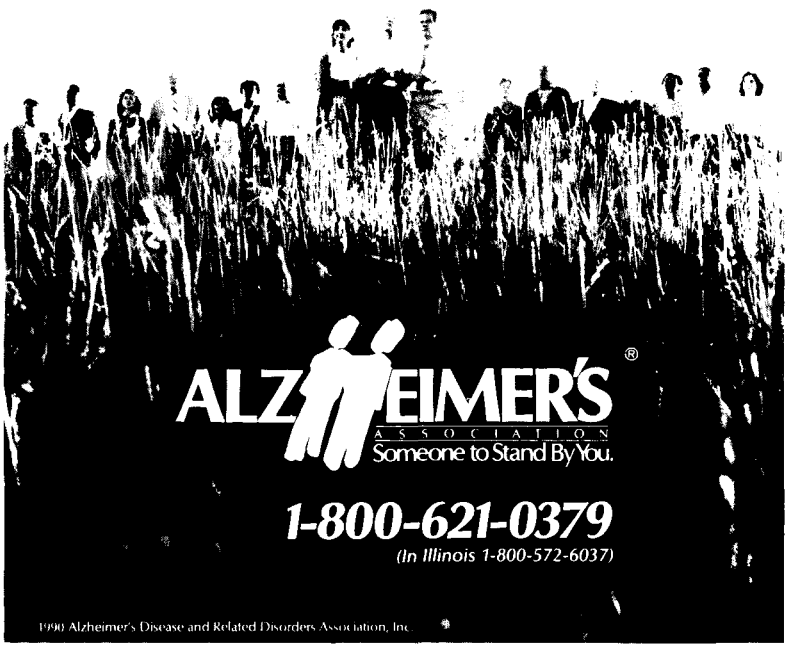

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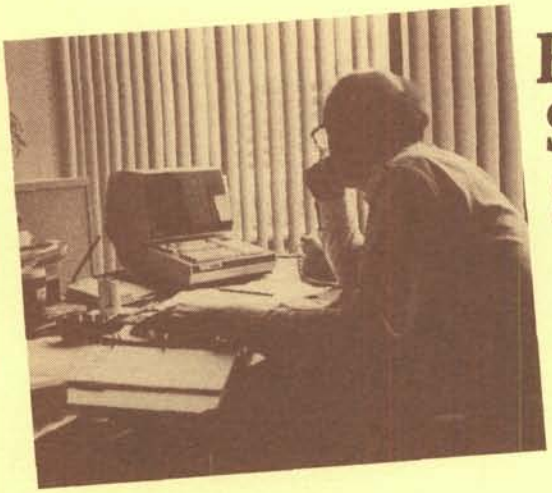

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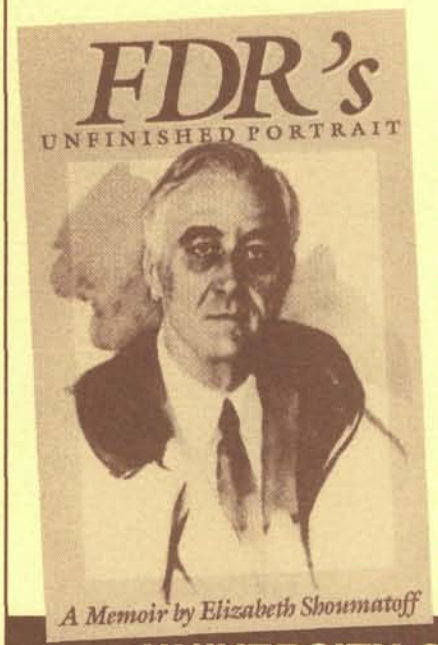

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